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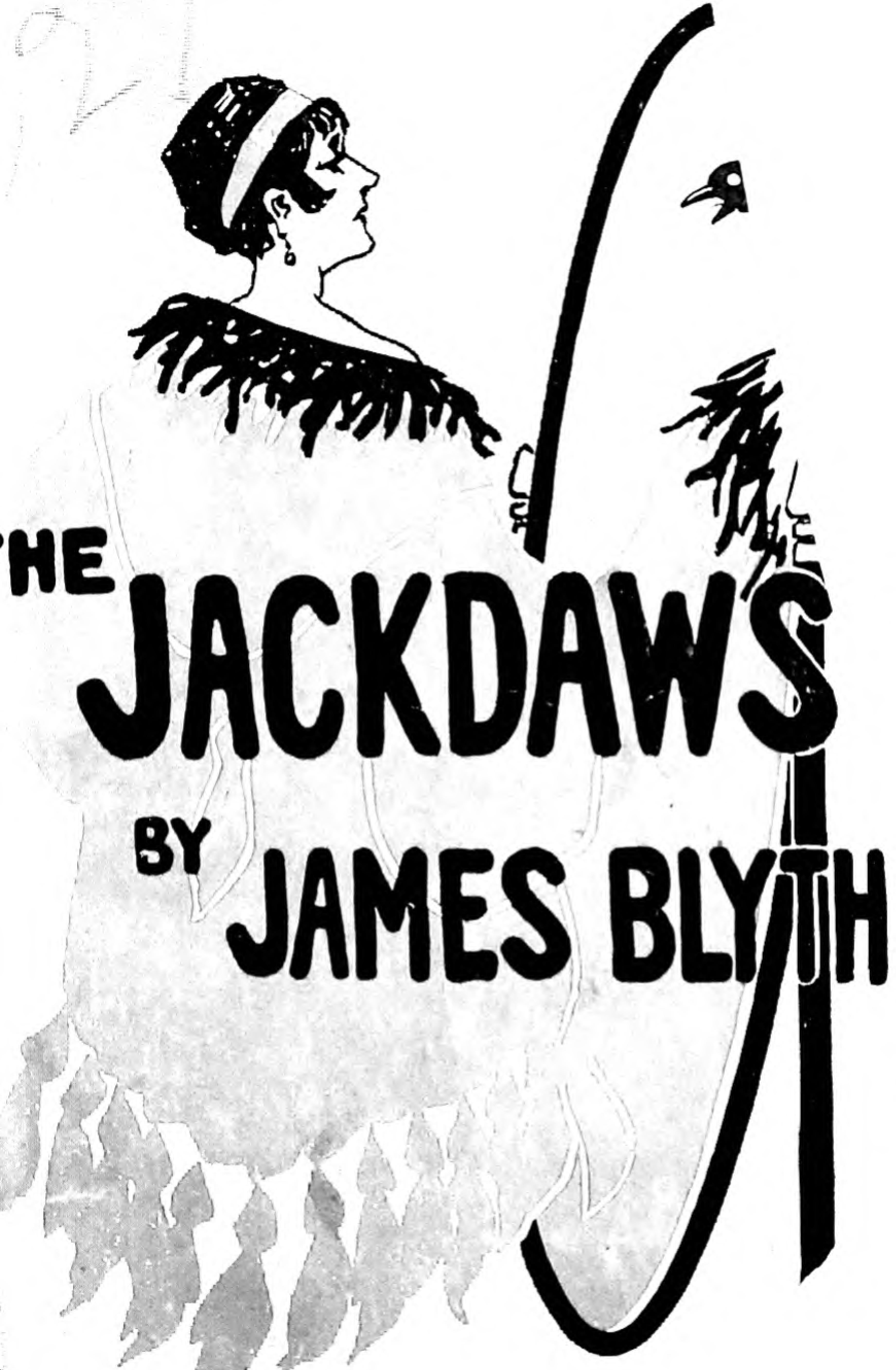

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A NOVEL

BY

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To

JOHN WOODGER, Esq.,

of Lowestoft,

I dedicate this story with sincere

and deep esteem.

James Blyth.

June, 1919.

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THE JACKDAWS

CHAPTER I

A CALLOW BIRD

Mabel Greenfield replaced the telegram she had just read in its envelope and bit her lips. "Whatever shall I do for his food ?" she said to herself. "He ought to have given me more notice. Whatever shall I do ?"

She certainly exhibited little enthusiasm at the receipt of the news that her husband, Captain Jack Greenfield, was at last about to visit her at Cocklemouth, the South-Western seaside resort at which she had taken up her residence about a year after the declaration of the war. But a moment's thought brought a look of complacency to her rather sombre face. No longer would the old catamarans of the town be able to sniff at her and mutter behind her back that she might have a husband and might not, and that no one knew, but that her daughter Beatrice, a child of ten, was more to be pitied than blamed, though "of course, my dear, I could not let my children play with her."

Now all that would be altered. Perhaps her husband would see that he ought to manage to let her have more money. She would be able to recommence her campaign to take a leading place in the provincial society of the town in which she had as yet signally failed. It was true that her parsimonious nature began to count on the extra housekeeping expenses which Jack's visit would entail. Except in regard to her child she was "very near." "Oh!" she thought, "he'll have to let me have more money and that is all about it."

She rose and went to the door and opened it. "Beatie," she called. "Beatie."

She was a tall, willowy woman, very frail and very dark, with great dying eyes, and a mass of dark hair which sometimes glowed into bronze in the full light of the sun. Her face was long and narrow; her nose long, aquiline and very thin; her mouth small, with pale thin lips. Beneath the "V" of her bodice her chest scarcely swelled, and her skin, save where it was browned by exposure, was very smooth and pallid with the pallor which is seen in anæmic women.

There was no light of laughter in her smile, which expressed complacency and not humour. A slight pinching of the flesh on either side of her mouth, and the narrowness of the spaces between upper and lower eyelids, which held her great eyes, warned a student of physiognomy, that she could be fretful and mean, that her ambitions were likely to be petty, and her outlook on the world self-centred.

There was nothing of her personality in the little room in which she was, a tiny chamber furnished with commonplace specimens of modern work which all looked new. A few shelves along one side of the room contained novels. But a glance at these proved that they were her husband's. A small cottage piano which filled nearly a quarter of the room space was heaped with *bric-à-brac*. The piano, chairs, table and corner cupboard were all of imitation ebony, and the colour scheme of the room was unrelieved black. Through the French windows, which looked out upon a tiny terrace, from which a strip of garden fell abruptly to the top of a high wall, overlooking a road cut half way up a steep rise of land, vicious draughts often came whispering in, setting swinging the tassels of the red tablecloth which covered the black round top of the small table in the centre of the room.

"Beatie," Mabel Greenfield called again.

She stood listening at the open door for a few moments, and then returned to the easy-chair from which she had risen, leaving the door open. She frowned as she sat, and her long foot, one of ample size, beat impatiently on the carpet.

Presently a long limbed girl of ten came in, shrugging her shoulders, or rather wriggling them, and jerking the two divided strands of her pigtail right and left. "Well, mummy," she said, sullenly, "What is it now? I'm busy with my lessons."

Her mother eyed her doubtfully. If she was busy with her lessons how was it that she had not been in every minute or two to ask for assistance? She never did her lessons without Mabel's aid. But as she looked at the child the mother's eyes softened. She idolised the little girl. "I called you," she said, "to tell you that your father is coming here to-night. He doesn't say by what train. And whatever I shall do to get extra food I don't know, unless Mr. Tompkins can help us. The visitors *are* such a nuisance; and I'm sure the shopkeepers give them the preference."

"Oh, bother," said the child. "I suppose he'll want you to be with him all day now, and pester me about what I'm learning."

Beatrice was a spoilt child, and ruled her mother with a callous indifference to the love which made her rule possible. Her will was law. The very food was bought and cooked to suit her tastes.

When Mabel Lightfoot married Jack Greenfield she ascended at least six rungs in the social ladder. Even her two elder sisters of the whole blood, who had climbed one and two rungs respectively by means of the elevating dynamic force which is associated with some matrimonial alliances, admitted that she had "done the best of the family."

As for her half-sister Sara Slack, who was known to have worked as a barmaid in the East End of London, the children of Mrs. Lightfoot's second venture never referred to her. In Herringhaven, Daneshire, where Sam Lightfoot pursued the business of a slop seller, Sara's name was taboo. Certainly no announcement had been sent to her of any one of the three marriages, which had brought satisfaction and *kudos* to her mother and step-sisters.

Jack Greenfield was a chemist of some eminence, the manager of a large firm of analytical and manufacturing chemists, in receipt of a salary of three hundred and fifty pounds a year. In addition, he had a small private property bringing him in about another hundred a year. He was a member of an old Daneshire family of sufficient importance to enable him to enter the best society of Herringhaven, though he was hardly regarded as an equal by the "county people."

He was a tall, well set-up, good-looking young fellow of six and twenty at the time of his marriage, as thorough a gentleman as ever came out of Daneshire, good-hearted, a little simple, but very clever in his work. He showed Scandinavian blood in his blue eyes and tawny hair, as well as in the spread of his shoulders and the quality of his brawn and sinew.

Necessarily he moved in a different sphere from the Lightfoots. Old Sam was better known in the public bars than in the private houses, and he had even failed to obtain admission into either of the political clubs which the town boasted, catholic in their embrace though they were. His son Dick was following in his father's footsteps. The two elder girls had married respectively a bank clerk and a brewer's collector, and, until Mabel's apotheosis, had considered that they had done sufficiently well to justify them in cutting the rest of the family, a course of action which they bitterly regretted when they saw Mabel soar far above them and do unto them as they had done unto their parents.

Mabel had the satisfaction of imparting to these deserving ladies the feelings which they had bestowed upon their mother. As for old Sam, he recked little who cut him and who did not, provided he had enough cash in his pocket to keep him in malt extract and other popular forms of alcoholic refreshment.

Naturally Mabel saw as little of her family after her marriage as its members permitted. Only for her sister Lucy, a pretty and well-mannered girl of twelve at the time of her marriage, did she retain any sisterly affection; only with Lucy did she continue to associate with any intimacy.

With her married sisters she had nothing to do. In their maiden days they had earned their living as typists, whereas Mabel had "gone out as a governess." It was true that her attainments only permitted her to obtain situations which were little better than those of a "nursery governess." Still, she considered that the instruction of children of the age of six or seven was not so degrading as taking down letters in shorthand and typing them.

It was at the house of one of her employers that she had met Jack Greenfield. The children then under her care were veritable little demons, and their mother was one of those women, to the type of whom Mabel herself belonged, who delight in "putting governesses in their place." Jack had first felt sorry for her. She had a veneer of emotional sensitiveness which concealed her real nature. She had taken Jack's sympathy, twisted it in her adroit hands, and, by dint of a good deal of manœuvring, converted it into love. Necessarily Jack soon suffered disillusionment. But he was wise and philosophical, and determined to make the best of his bargain. For his part, he would have been willing enough to see more of his wife's family. Indeed, he had asked Mabel once or twice, after he had heard some of old Sam's delinquencies discussed with roars of laughter, whether he could not do something for the old boy. But Mabel had forbidden him to offer to assist her father in any way, and Jack shrugged his shoulders, and, for the sake of a quiet life, did not persist in his generous intentions.

"Rum things women are!" he pondered. "Why shouldn't I give the old boy a lift?"

He was glad that his wife chose to spread the mantle of her patronage over Lucy, although the latter was inclined to laugh at her elder sister's airs and graces, and he became fond of the child, and pleased to see that she was growing up the prettiest and most dainty of all the Lightfoot girls. And Lucy reciprocated his affection, and but for him would have revolted against the crude insolence of Mabel's condescension.

As years passed, Mabel proved to have one virtue. She was at least a devoted mother, and when Beatrice was born in the second year of their marriage, even social ambitions for a time became relegated in the mother's heart to the second place. But while this unselfish devotion may possibly have been good for the mother it was lamentably deleterious for the child, who grew up entirely spoilt, a detestably conceited and selfish little prig. More than once the father protested for the child's own sake. Finding, however, that his protests did more harm than good and were often met with temper, hysteria, and accusations that he was jealous, for the sake of peace and quiet he let things go and began to spend less and less time at home. It followed that the mother and child made an alliance against the father, and that Beatrice came to consider her father's room preferable to his company. All this Lucy, now growing into a very pretty well-mannered young woman, observed ,with disgust, and with a sympathy for Jack which she did not scruple to show.

Among other interests of his in which Mabel had no share, Jack had enrolled himself in the local Territorial Garrison Artillery, and soon won a commission.

When the war broke out he had obtained the rank of Captain. It was then that Mabel perceived what use might be made of a matter which she had previously regarded as a senseless hobby of her husband's. For if "Mrs. Greenfield" was a name of some social eminence, what might not be made of "Mrs. Captain Greenfield ?"

Jack joined his battery at once and became a Captain to all intents and purposes, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a Captain "during the duration of the war."

"There is no occasion for us to remain here longer," said Mabel, a night or two after her husband's position became clearly defined. "You are to be stationed at Goddelby. Beatie and I will—— "

"Oh, nonsense," cried Jack. "Moving is an expensive business, and you must remember that our income will be considerably reduced."

And to this decision he adhered, until the raids on the East coast and his own appointment to duty at Gibraltar afforded his wife a valid reason for refusing to remain longer in her native town.

"And I think it is just as well too," she said, with an unpleasant gleam in her great eyes. "I have noticed that you and Lucy are getting altogether too intimate. I have not said anything before, but—— "

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," protested Jack, whose association with his pretty sister-in-law had been entirely fraternal and innocent. "I was going to suggest that you should take her with you when you've made up your mind where you wish to settle down. You are sure to have a difficulty in getting servants, and she would be able to help you about the house."

Now Mabel had herself thought that this would be a good notion, and she regretted that she had cut off her nose to spite her face, and had been unable to resist the temptation of saying something nasty for the mere pleasure of saying it.

However, it was said and she would abide by it. It was true to some extent that she had become jealous of her younger sister, and had observed with displeasure how well Lucy and Jack agreed together. She was incapable of admitting that the decrease in sympathy between herself and her husband arose from her own omission to interest him, to enter into his life, or to make herself as desirable to him as she had done before their marriage. So it was not difficult for her to assure herself that Lucy had designs on Jack, that she was a dangerous " minx "—" After all I've done for her too "—and that it was just as well to break off close association with her now that there was an excuse in the impending move.

The Greenfields had spent their honeymoon at Cocklemouth, on the South Devon coast, and Mabel had taken a fancy to the place, as many people do who have merely spent a short holiday there without mixing with any of the local people. So it was to Cocklemouth that she decided to go. Down in the South-West at Cocklemouth as " Mrs. Captain Greenfield " she would be respected and admitted into the most select circles, she thought.

Alas! She did not know that Cocklemouth is full of retired Colonels and Generals, Admirals and Captains, that poor Jack's rank would make but a sorry show, and that, especially since the war, military and naval titles were as common as blackberries in the little town.

So Mabel and Beatie went down to Cocklemouth, and settled in rooms pending the hiring and plenishing of a house fit to contain a lady of so much social importance as "Mrs. Captain Greenfield."

A small house was found and taken. And Jack, pleased at the prospect of a change from the life which had only been made tolerable to him by Lucy, raised no difficulties, spent nearly a couple of hundred in buying new furniture at Maybreds, and thought it cheap at the price.

He had taken his farewell of his wife and daughter when they left Herringhaven. But naturally enough he avaïled himself of the services Lucy pressed upon him, in choosing and packing up the things which were to be sent from the house at Herringhaven to Cocklemouth.

It was from Lucy that he took his last farewell on his last leave before sailing for Gibraltar.

Lucy had become a very pretty girl of twenty. She was not so tall as Mabel, but quite as lissome and more shapely, for her limbs and bust were round and perfectly moulded, her movements were springly and graceful, her expression eager and full of fire. She was well knit and carried herself upright, with squared shoulders. Her walk was full of a lithe grace. Her eyes were quite as large as Mabel's, of the same colour, but they were set in wider frames, with even longer and more curling lashes, and were honest, bright lively eyes, fearless and full of humour and passion. Her face was not so long, her lips were full and red, her cheeks well fleshed and rosy, daintily dimpled on either side of her mouth. In fact, she was an improved edition of her sister, possessing all Mabel's beauties, more highly developed, and none of her defects. And her spirit was as bright and honest as her looks. It seemed as if the parents had at last succeeded in turning out a scion of their race in whom it would be hard to find a cause for adverse criticism.

And as Jack took her hand and bent to kiss her good-bye he felt that perhaps his wife was right, that perhaps it was as well that he and Lucy were to be parted for a time. The girl had come to mean more to him than he had guessed, and his lips trembled a little as he pressed them to her forehead.

But Lucy, in her real innocence, and ignorant of the meaning of her beating heart, looked at him wonderingly and held up her mouth like a child.

Despite himself he could not help letting a little of, the feeling, of which he had only just been made aware, show in his kiss upon her lips. Lucy closed her eyes and held her head back as their lips met. She gave a little gasp, and turned white for a moment, and he felt her quiver in his arms.

"Good-bye, dear," he said, releasing her, and not daring to meet her eyes.

Lucy was thrilled with something new to her. She was a little frightened, but did not in the least know why. The idea that Jack could be more than a brother even to her thoughts was beyond her comprehension. All she knew was that she passionately resented the necessity of parting with him.

"You'll come back soon, Jack?" she asked; "and you'll write to me sometimes?"

Jack hesitated. He thought that it would be unwise to give this new feeling a chance to continue, nay, possibly to grow.

"I shan't have much time," he said. "Mabel will send you on all news of me."

"Oh no, she won't," Lucy began to say. But she checked herself, and looked at Jack pityingly. After all it was not for her to complain of her sister to her sister's husband.

"Well, good-bye," said Jack. "You'll see the things are sent off."

"Yes," she said. "Good-bye."

It may be that her recollection of Jack set up a certain standard in Lucy's heart which was the reason why she was still unmarried when, nearly three years later, Mabel opened his telegram saying that he had arrived in England and might be expected down at Cocklemouth in the course of the day.

CHAPTER II

JACK COMES HOME

BEATIE stood sullenly looking at her mother, swinging the plaits of her pigtail from side to side, while Mabel considered whether she should rebuke the child for her lack of filial affection for her father. The mother vaguely realised that it was her duty to do so. But she could not bring herself to find fault with the child whom she adored.

"Never mind," she said, stooping to embrace the little girl. "Mummy will see that you are not worried. Now run along up to Mr. Tompkins, and tell him father will be here to-night. He may come down otherwise, and I don't wish your father's first evening here to be interrupted. And ask him if he can spare any eggs or bacon, or cheese, or anything!"

"Oh, I don't want to. It's such a fag dragging up that hill, mummy. And it is so hot. He's sure to bring some cabbages or something before teatime, and you can tell him then."

"Very well, dear. Perhaps you had better do your lessons. You won't have much time after father comes home."

"Won't you come with me, mummy? It will save so much time. I shall have to keep running in to ask you questions, if you don't."

"Very well, dear," replied the obedient mother.

She followed her daughter to the dining-room, on the table of which were piled books and papers in a fine confusion, and, presently, was hard at work doing Beatrice's exercises for her.

Timothy Tompkins was a retired shopkeeper, though Mabel was unaware of the fact. He had kept a haberdasher's shop in Birmingham with fair success, but it had been a lucky speculation in rubber which had enabled him to retire from business. Desirous of placing a considerable distance between the venue of his shopkeeping era and the locality where he proposed to live out the rest of his life as "a gentleman," he settled on Cocklemouth as the desired haven, bought about an acre of land on the slope of a steep hill, built on it a hideous red brick house, and occupied himself in making a vegetable garden on the slope, just opposite the gate leading to the steps down to Mabel's front door. Here he and his wife prepared to enter on a campaign destined to introduce them into Cocklemouth Society. There were no children, and, before long, so far as the campaign was concerned, there was no wife. For Tompkins speedily recognised that his wife was not of a nature to combat the snubs and insolences with which Cocklemouth "ladies" are won't to greet new settlers within their holy region. Moreover, neither Tompkins nor Mrs. Tompkins was fitted by nature or education to pose as of a higher class than that to which they had previously belonged; and he soon followed his wife into a retirement which was forced upon both of them.

It was only with visitors and with new settlers that Tompkins now attempted to associate. For some time he had devoted himself to a Mrs. Muriel Wallis, who had come to Cocklemouth with her three children in circumstances somewhat similar to those of Mabel Greenfield. His intimacy with that simple-minded and lonely little lady, who had suffered the ostracism which was also the fate of Mabel Greenfield, for the greater part of her three years residence at the little seaside resort, had created some scandal, though Muriel Wallis was perfectly innocent in her relations with the man, and had lately terminated her connection both with him and the town by moving her residence to the East of England. Since then Tompkins had done his best to impose himself on Mabel Greenfield as her chief friend. As will be seen she had battled with the Cocklemouth snobs till her parsimony advised her that the game was not worth the candle. Unfortunately, like many women, she did not know a cad from a gentleman, and when Tompkins, bereft of Muriel Wallis, made his insidious advances to gain her good graces she welcomed him.

She was a weak woman, vain of her personal appearance, and unduly exalted by her rise in life. Like most upstarts she thought it was necessary to emphasise her new status by gross insolence to her inferiors in station.

Suffering from her ostracism by the amusing snobs of the town society and from the resentment, to a great extent justified, shown by the tradespeople at her off-hand manner to them, she accepted Tompkins' advances more readily than she would have done in normal times, and he had succeeded in becoming an *ami intime* at her house, although his wife rarely called there. He had believed her tale of a husband who was a captain in the army and a famous analytical chemist. He gambled on its truth, and, unable to foresee the view which a gentleman like Jack Greenfield would take of him, he had gambled on becoming the captain's friend through his wife. That in the process of improving Mabel's acquaintance he would burn his wings at the fire of her fleshly allurements he had not suspected, but it was a fact.

I do not think that there is any doubt that Mabel herself guessed that Tompkins came very near to loving her, or, at least, to regarding her in a way which is often called "love," though it does not deserve the name.

She was engaged with Beatie over the French exercise forming a home lesson for the latter when, through the dining-room window, she saw the lean stooping form of Tompkins coming haltingly down the steep stone steps leading from Lambyre Road, on which her house fronted, to her doorstep.

Tompkins was a little over medium height, meagre, narrow shouldered, stooping, with arms that swung as though independent of his volition, and legs that waggled irresponsibly in uneven strides. The man was clean shaven, pale, with a huge thin-lipped mouth, huge outstanding ears, small pale blue eyes, a lean, short snub nose, with a perpetual grin on his usually pendulous lips.

His hair was of a dirty ash hue, thinning over the brows and exhibiting a tonsure-like bald circle on the crown of his bony head. His age was really forty-seven, though, until the act conscripting men up to and over that age, he had posed as forty-three. His voice was squeaky and his aspirates uncertain. How such a man could ever have proved attractive to any woman is one of those inter-sex marvels which are inexplicable. But he had certainly pleased Muriel Wallis sufficiently to come near to compromising her, and now he believed that he would be still more successful with Mabel Greenfield.

He did not stop at the front door, but made his way round the house to the terrace on to which the little room already described opened its French windows; and, without waiting for an invitation, he passed through the windows, which were left partly open to admit the Westerly breeze from the moor of that sultry July afternoon.

"Run and tell him we are here, Beatie," said Mabel, guessing that he would make his way in through the French windows.

"I don't want to, mummy," said the charming child. “I don’t want him to see my lesson books lying about. Let’s go to him in the buddy.”

The “buddy” was the child’s name for boudoir, a title which Mabel had given to the little room in the first flush of her disastrous social campaign at Cocklemouth.

“Very well, dear,” replied the obedient mother. “I think he has brought some cauliflowers. I saw them as he came down the steps.”

They found Tompkins casually strolling through the passage to the dining-room as though the house were his own. Apparently Mabel was used to this freedom of behaviour, for she took no notice of it.

Tompkins leisurely removed his hat, which he wore as he advanced. His pendulous lips tightened up a little, and then widened in a smile which extended more to the right than to the left. It was a lop-sided grin.

He sniggered rather than spoke. “I thought per’aps you could fency a cauliflower,” he simpered, presenting three diminutive specimens of cauliflowers, the size of which evidently did not correspond to their age. For that part of them which should have been close and white was open and loose, and of a yellow chrome colour.

Although Mabel had been a wife for more than eleven years, she was still entirely incapable of judging the quality of vegetables, meat, poultry, or, indeed, of any kind of food. And these cauliflowers resembled all the others she had received from Tompkins. Her great eyes woke from their normal sleepy indifference, and sent thrills into the heart of the man who confronted her. She was estimating the vegetables as worth quite sixpence.

“How kind of you, Mr. Tompkins,” she said. “I am afraid you rob yourself.”

“Oh lor, no. Why you know what a garden I’ve got. Nearly 'alf an acre. I shouldn't miss a dozen. And if I did miss 'em what should I care if you liked 'em."

He leered amorously at her, and she suavely absorbed his leer.

"And for you, little lady," he said to Beatie, who hung expectant, her eyes upon the pockets of his coat, "I managed to get some torfee this mornin'."

The child snatched at the packet he held out. She tolerated him because he usually brought her something she liked.

"You are always so kind," said Mabel, leading the way back to the "buddy."

"I s'pose I shall have the pleasure of seein' you up to spend Sunday afternoon in the garden as usual," simpered the man.

Mabel had been wondering how she should announce her husband's imminent arrival. This gave her an opportunity which she took.

"I am afraid not," she said. "I have had a telegram from my husband, Captain Greenfield, to say that he expects to reach here to-night, and he will hardly care to go out on Sunday."

Tompkins's face fell, but only for a moment. He had a use for Jack, and in his utter ignorance of ordinary civilised behaviour, he saw no reason why he should not take a liberty with a man on the first occasion of their meeting.

"Ah!" he said," I suppose you're all excitement lookin' forward to seein' him. Three year since you saw him, ain't it?"

"Yes. More than three years."

"Ah! A chemist by trade, ain't he?"

Mabel flushed. Really Tompkins was a little trying sometimes.

"Not a shopkeeping chemist," said Mabel, who was unaware of Tompkins's previous occupation.

"He is a great analyst, and the managing director of Wright and Hooper, the manufacturers you know."

There is a considerable difference between being a managing director and a manager at a salary. But Mabel was sure that she was quite near enough to the truth. "Of course," she added, "I mean that he was, before he gave up everything to go and fight."

"What I mean is he knows how chemicals work, hay ?"

"Oh, of course. I believe he is a most eminent chemist. But why ?"

"Oh, never mind. I daresay he will be able to tell me a thing or two if he hasn't forgotten. So he's comin' here at last ! That'll make some of the old tabbies about here tuck their claws in, he, he, he !"

The trill of the electric bell, followed by the galumphing footsteps of "Gladys" the maid, warned the little party in the "buddy" that someone was at the front door.

And before another word was exchanged between the man, the woman, and the child, a bright hearty, manly voice was heard crying, "Mabel ! Beatie ! Where are you both ?"

Mabel did not start. Quick movement of any kind was contrary to her constitution. But her eyelids flickered a moment, her lips trembled, and she turned even paler than she naturally was.

Somehow the relations between her and Tompkins seemed altered by her husband's arrival, seemed less innocent than indeed they were, and Tompkins underwent the same experience. He looked uneasily at the French windows. Should he slip out that way and so postpone his meeting with Jack.

Mabel understood his look, but shook her head. "Come and meet my husband," she said. "I expect Gladys has told him you are here." She thus informed him why it would be unwise for him to slink off, and at the same time relieved the tension which had arisen from some unknown cause.

"Oh, this way are they?" Jack was heard to say. "Rum thing it is not to know your way in your own house. All well are they?"

"Yes, sir." Gladys' dulcet tones informed her mistress that her husband had found favour in her servant's sight. There was no mistaking the tone of admiration in the girl's voice.

The firm swift steps of a vigorous man echoed through the passage-like hall, the door flung open, and, like a breeze of clean fresh sea air, Jack burst in.

"Why, old girl," he said, "it's good to see you again. And Beatie! Why, what a great girl she's grown."

He took the child beneath the arm pits and lifted her, and kissed her heartily.

"Oh don't, daddy," she protested. "You mux me up."

Jack's eyes clouded, and he seemed nervous as he now turned to his wife. "This is Mr. Tompkins, Jack," she said. "He has been so kind to us. He has just brought me these lovely cauliflowers."

Jack looked at Tompkins, and summed him up at a glance. He began to feel as though he were in a dream. He looked puzzled. The cheery breeziness of his manner died away. His eyes wandered from Tompkins to Mabel, from Mabel to Beatie, and back again to Mabel.

Tompkins's mouth expanded in a wide grin, as he took a step forward and held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Captain," he said. "I was just talking about you. If you have time, I want you to come to my place to-night or to-morrow, and see if you can tell me of some chemical stuff which will kill caterpillars without 'arming the green stuff, and there is a way I'm told of making Apenta water cheap, you're sure to know. I want you to give me the prescription. I must not stay longer now. But I hope you'll come up to-night or to-morrow and see my garden, or p'raps Sunday afternoon. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Greenfield; by-by, Beatie; he, he, oh revoy, Captain."

The man was ill at ease, and instead of taking his leave as an ordinary visitor, through the front door, he coolly opened the French windows, and stepped out on to the terrace, once again behaving as though the place were his own.

Jack had nodded to him, but beyond that had made no response to his welcome or his bland requests. By the time Tompkins had disappeared round the corner, Jack had recovered his mental stability.

He had looked forward to his home coming. His three years' absence had softened his feelings of resentment against his wife, feelings generated during eight years of married life, the nature of which has already been indicated. He had seen and felt himself taking Mabel in his arms, and kissing her soft lips. He was a fine fellow and a good sportsman, and a singularly clean liver. But for that moment of emotion with Lucy, which had alarmed him and made him glad to get away for a time, he could honestly say to himself that there was nothing in his life, either before or after he joined the army, which he could not tell Mabel. He had hoped that their separation might have rendered his wife more appreciative of his company, fonder of himself. Their reunion had loomed before him like a second honeymoon. And Beatie. She would have grown out of her spoilt child stage. He knew that she went to school, and he could not imagine a school where she would not find her level, would not learn her place, where, in fact, the ill-effects of her mother's excessive tenderness would not be neutralised. And though he had often been angry with the child, he was very fond of her. His absence from home for three years had made him see all his past domestic life through a softening haze. Other men who had left their wives and little ones at home had talked with him out in Gibraltar. He had longed for home again and forgotten that it had once wearied him ineffably, that his relations with his wife had been strained, and that his child had been an ill-mannered, testy-tempered specimen of the true *enfant gâté*. His friends had envied him his leave. During the voyage home he had yearned for his domestic circle. Never had home seemed so delightful to him as in the anticipation of again seeing it.

And now! His child had asked him not to kiss her because he "muxed her up." He had found an absolute bounder in his house, behaving as though he were a frequent and very intimate *ami de la maison.* His wife had shown no pleasure at seeing him. Of course she could not have rushed in his arms while that other blighter was there. But now that he was gone, she stood looking at him with uneasy eyes, silent, as though he had come as a wet blanket, as though he were not wanted in his own house.

He no longer felt any desire to take Mabel in his arms and kiss her. He was a good judge of men, and had estimated Tompkins at his true value at a glance. Moreover, though he was a very good natured man, he loathed "liberties." Nothing irritated him more than to be called "Greenfield" *tout court* by any one who was not justified in doing so by length or closeness of association. And he felt that Tompkins would call him "Greenfield" the first time he went to his house, if he ever went. The impudence of the man too, to ask him to use his knowledge of chemistry to kill his damned caterpillars! The next time he supposed he would want to have some rat poison made up! Did he think he was an apothecary behind a counter?

Mabel advanced to him and held up her mouth.

" Aren't you going to kiss me, Jack ? " she said.

Jack stooped and rather perfunctorily touched her lips with his. There was nothing of that clinging ecstasy in the kiss which had set him all a tremble when he last kissed Lucy. Passion, to the revival of which he had looked forward as possible, was dead.

But his name, honour, and fair repute were still of moment.

" Who the devil is that blighter ? " he asked.

CHAPTER III

ROGER UPTON

Jack was the first of the married pair to wake the next morning, and he woke with that uneasy, empty sensation which most of us have experienced on waking on the morning following some great disappointment.

As he lay beside his sleeping wife, he reviewed the story of her troubles which she had told him on the previous evening.

"I believe it would be a good thing if she had Lucy come and stay with her for a month or two," he thought. "I'll suggest it. She must have got rid of that silly notion of hers." He knew that the girl had a great deal of sound sense, and although Mabel would undoubtedly try to patronise her and pooh pooh her ideas, he believed that the elder sister would be influenced for the better by the younger. So far as he could gather from what his wife had said on the previous evening, she hardly had a feminine associate in the town with whom she was on terms approaching intimacy. Surely she would be glad to have her sister with her. And Lucy would soon sum up Tompkins and put him in his place. Jack did not doubt his wife's fidelity. It was not that which made him wish to find a companion for her who might act as a buffer between her and this sniggering fool of a man. But he felt it a kind of personal degradation that his wife should condescend to be on such terms with Tompkins, as the behaviour of the latter suggested.

He rose stealthily without waking Mabel, dressed himself in mufti, and, finding that it was only half-past seven, determined to find his way to the sea and brace himself with a swim.

He dived from the end of the trumpery little pier, and, on coming to the surface, before he had finished his first gasps at the shock of the water, he heard himself hailed by another swimmer.

"Hullo, Greenfield!" shouted a genial boyish voice. "When did you get home? Didn't know you belonged about here."

Jack dashed the water from his eyes with his right hand, and recognised his hailer as a man whom he had known at Gib. as Lieutenant Roger Upton, with whom he had been on very good terms.

"Got here last night," he said. "I don't belong here. I'm a Daneshire man like yourself. But my wife and daughter are down here for the duration of the war, don't you know. I got down last night. Didn't expect to find you here though. Devilish glad, old man."

"Oh, I'm staying on the front here. Some friends of mine, the Horrexes, asked me down to recuperate after I was discharged from hospital. But after I'd put in a fortnight with them some other fellows turned up, Percy Burnside and Lance Perryman, and this made rather a crush up at Cockleview, their place, so I cleared and took rooms on my own."

Roger Upton had gone into the army through the orthodox Channels of the "Shop" at Woolwich.

He was younger than Jack Greenfield, and when the latter had known him at Gib. was only a "loot." A year in France had, however, brought him promotion to brevet rank. Of good county blood and a man of considerable means, inherited from his mother who had brought a fortune made in commerce to a Daneshire squire, he was still a bachelor. Of the middle height he was slightly built, but he was wiry and far more powerful than he looked. His features were delicate and Norman in type. His dark eyes were those rather of a dreamer and a poet than of a fighter. Yet no man had a better name for courage or initiative in the Artillery.

Light-hearted and generous, he was a favourite with all who knew him.

The two men swam ashore, dressed, and strolled back to the town together, each narrating his experiences since they had last parted.

"I'll meet you here soon after ten then," said Jack, as he shook his friend's hand on the esplanade where the latter had taken rooms.

"Right oh," said Upton. "By the way, the Horrexes and the crowd staying with them will want to know you. I've told them that yarn of your adventure with the Hun spy in the fourth gallery, and you'll find they will—— "

"Oh, rot," said Jack, for he was a modest man, and the story to which Upton referred was one of an act which approached the heroic.

"Rum the tables being turned, Jack," said Upton, as he strode off. "You were my superior officer on the rock. But it's all a bit of luck my being major now. If I hadn't been out in France and you had, you'd be a colonel and I still a two pipper. Well, good luck till I see you."

"Good chap that," thought Jack, as he walked briskly up past the opening shops to the turning leading to Lambyre Road.

"By Jove! If Lucy comes—I wonder!"

"The girl ought to have a chance," he told himself, "though goodness knows I don't wish to play the matchmaker. All I hope is that Mabel won't be jealous of her!"

Mabel was so pleased with her husband's meeting with Upton, that she was more easily persuaded to

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write to Lucy to invite her to Cocklemouth than she would have been had it not taken place.

The Horrexes kept themselves aloof from the townspeople, and were regarded by the latter, who had snubbed Mabel so offensively, with envy and awe. George Horrex was an elderly coal magnate, and had bought the finest estate in Cocklemouth some years before the war for a seaside residence. Since the air raids had sent people scuttling to the South, Adoline Horrex had broken up her London residence and retired to her country quarters, which she made tolerable by a constant sufficiency of susceptible male guests who might be benefited by a stay in the mild climate of the district. Her elderly husband saw little of the visitors, and lived for the most part in strict retirement in his own rooms. Now and then he dined at the general dinner-table. But more often he kept himself apart.

The old fellow had every confidence in his wife and regarded her frequent and vivid flirtations as harmless methods of amusement, so that while Adoline startled the envious townspeople by her disregard for conventionality, old George Horrex only chuckled at her patent amourettes. And in this the old boy showed his wisdom.

Adoline was a very handsome woman of about thirty-five, golden haired and blue eyed, and she was as good-hearted and generous as she was indifferent to public opinion. She knew very well that there was not an old dowager in Cocklemouth who would not give her *toupée* to be asked to join the côterie of Cockleview, and that the venomous tittle-tattle which was snarled about her name at the town tea-tables mostly arose from sheer jealousy. She delighted in shocking "the old frumps" as she called the local ladies, and she took care to choose her guests of such a kind as would be likely to support her in her endeavours to practise her arts of fascination to the uttermost.

The idea that she might enter those sacred precincts filled Mabel with delight.

She felt fonder of her husband since he had told her about Upton and his intimacy with the Horrexes. She wrote to her sister Lucy quite eagerly and kindly. Her giddy brain was full of the possibilities of triumph over the *bourgeoises* of the town, who had treated her so insolently; and when Beatie, jealous of the introduction of a new candidate for her mother's attention, asked why "Auntie Lucy" was coming, Mabel snapped at her. "Because she is."

Beatie might be a tie upon her if she entered the Cockleview circle.

CHAPTER IV

AN INVITATION

As the three made their way down the town, the streets wore a very different aspect from that which had greeted Jack on going to and from the sea before breakfast. They were now crowded. In the butchers' and grocers' shops there was hardly standing room. It was easy enough to distinguish the visitors, who appeared to form the majority, from the residents. There was a brightness and intelligence, an interest in life, to be seen on the strange faces which were, for the most part, entirely lacking in the Cocklemouthians. Moreover, the dresses and hats of the women, in some cases genuinely emanating from London, and in others endeavouring to pretend to do so, marked out the migrants. The correct thing in Cocklemouth is to dress with a sobriety and lack of individuality, which come near to a drab frowsiness. Among the *élite*, such as the bank manager's wife, Mrs. Powter (who might easily be mistaken for a charwoman), or the vicar's wife, Lavinia Speke, all bright colours, all smart *chaussure*, are taboo. Even the younger examples of the really "best people" affect drab and shapeless garments. Only among the shop girls is there any neatness or smartness. All classes of natives delight in pungent scents, and most women, of whatever age, besmear their faces with powder and carmine to an extent which is rarely seen outside certain notorious districts in London or Paris. It was not only by their attire that Cocklemouthians exhibit their dislike of anything approaching frivolity.

Jack Greenfield picked out certain faces which appalled him by their downcast, leaden expression. When the prevailing impression given was not that of doltish ignorance, it was that of petty malice. Never, Jack thought, had he seen so many elderly feminine faces which were either nearly brutish in their heavy indifference, or repellent by the venom they suggested. Here and there a well cut costume, properly worn, might be seen on a resident. But nearly always it was of some dark material, and in many cases its wearer, although long a resident at Cocklemouth, originally came from another district, or had been subjected, by marriage or otherwise, to the influence of a stranger. It was as easy to separate the visitors from the residents as to separate sheep from goats.

As soon as Mabel realised the numbers abroad she began to complain.

"You must really let me have more money, Jack. The prices of things are so awful here that there is nothing left for clothes. I'm sure Beatie has not got a frock fit to go out in."

"So far as I can judge from the local magnates you have pointed out," said Jack, with a grin, "the shabbier she is the better. I've seen two or three old tabbies look askance at your hat, my dear. And I heard one mutter to an old crone, who looked a hundred, that it was disgusting. She had her eye on the length of your skirt as she spoke."

"It is not a bit too short," cried Mabel indignantly. "Do *you* think it is? Do you think Major Upton will think it is?"

Jack chuckled to himself. How funny women were! He replied solemnly. "Not a bit, my dear. I believe, though, that they are wearing 'em a bit longer this summer. Ahem!"

He had heard one girl say this to another in the train by which he came down, and he was amused to see that his wife took him seriously.

"Yes. I know," she said. "And this skirt is not so short as those I wore last year. Oh, Jack, you might tell me!"

"Well," said Jack, pulling a long face, "if I may judge from what I saw on my way through town you are a long way from the limit! My dear girl, why on earth do you trouble about what these people think? It is true that I've not seen much of them here yet. But if you are right in pointing out the bettermost people here, I should say that they were only fit to criticise a jumble sale."

"There is one thing," said Mabel, her face becoming more complacent. "Mrs. Horrex is not a dowdy. She is awfully smart. And if she does make up, she doesn't make up half so much as some of the women who belong here do."

"What's this stink of cheap scent?" asked Jack, a few yards further on. "Is there a scent distillery here?"

"Oh, no, daddy," cried Beatie, at last losing some of her resentment at her father's return. "It's them!" She giggled delightedly. "Don't they scent themselves! I b'lieve they has to!"

"Wha-at?" laughed Jack. "Well, well, I must admit that the local aristocracy look as if they might use a little more soap with advantage. Hallo, Mabel, who's that?"

With honks and whistles a superb open car came speeding down the steep hill known as Lyemouth Road. The driver was a very pretty woman, round faced, stylish, her hair the real gold tint without a suggestion of peroxide. Her eyes were very large, of an exquisite forget-me-not blue shade. Her figure, concealed though it was by motoring attire, displayed its delicacy and perfection of line, and she was instinct with a grace and lightness which were infinitely charming. When the car passed the Greenfields, the great blue eyes were twinkling merrily at the words of a good-looking young officer who sat beside her. The rear part of the car was occupied by another officer. The party brightened the streets, and provided the gayest spectacle Jack had yet enjoyed in Cockle-mouth.

All its members were laughing and talking merrily.

"Oh, look," cried Mabel, looking longingly after the car as it shot past them. "That *is* Mrs. Horrex driving! Oh, Jack, do try to get Major Upton to introduce you to her. Then, perhaps, I shall get to know her, and it will make Mrs. Constable and Mrs. Coghlan so mad, and Mrs. Powter will nearly die with rage!"

Jack looked at her quizzically. Why on earth should she take such delight in making Mrs. Constable and Mrs. Coghlan mad, and Mrs. Powter die with rage? However, he wished to please her. The lack of warm affection in his heart inclined him to do his utmost to give her pleasure as a sort of atonement.

"All right," he said. "Roger was saying he wished me to know 'em. We may meet 'em all together on tho front, what?"

"Oh yes," cried Mabel, flushing with delight. "Beatie, run home and tell Gladys not to put on the potatoes till she sees us."

"I don't want to," said Beatie stoutly, seizing her father's hand. Any port in a storm. Although the child still resented her father's intrusion into the realms where she had been queen, she felt that he might assist her to do as she wished now. And, little snob as she was, she was just as eager as her mother to be able to say that she had spoken to Mrs. Horrex. It would enable her to "take it out" of some of her schoolfellows, who had followed the example set them by their mothers in sniffing at her as though she were of doubtful respectability.

"Do as you're told," said Jack angrily. "Mabel, I'm sorry that the child seems as much out of hand as ever. You should make her obey you at once. You seem to have no discipline over her at all."

Mabel hesitated. Her foolishly fond heart longed to take her child's side against Jack. But never had Jack seemed so meritorious in her eyes since his superior social elevation had raised her to its level. For the time, he glowed before her in the brilliant hues which he had worn in her imagination when he, the young gentleman, the friend and guest of her employer, had deigned to cast his handkerchief to the governess.

"You hear what your father says," she said crossly. "Run home at once. Then you may come back and look for us on the front."

"But I don't want to," persisted the child.

Mabel had never felt such a longing to smack the girl. She gave her one look which showed Beatie a new mother, a mother of the existence of whom she had had no knowledge. It did its work. With a wondering whimper, Beatie let go of her father's hand and slunk off.

Mabel almost nestled against her husband's side as the two swung round to the left, through Apple Gardens, towards the front.

It happened that they came upon Roger Upton as he was talking to the occupants of the car which had excited Mabel's admiration.

Upton hailed Jack, and then, turning to Mrs. Horrex, said, "Here is the very man. You remember the tale I told you of the German spy in the fourth gallery of the Rock."

Had Jack not been a good-looking, clean-looking stalwart man, with brave honest eyes, and rather full lips, he might not have received so warm a welcome.

Mrs. Horrex knew that he was married. Upton had told her that. She scanned the features of his wife, and turning round in her driver's seat smiled at the man behind, who returned her smile with interest. They had seen Mabel Greenfield before.

Jack introduced Mabel to Upton, and then a sort of general and free and easy introduction all round ensued. The lack of conventionality was so different from the manners of the Cocklemouth women that Mabel was delighted. She told herself, erroneously, that now she had met her real sort.

No one could have been kinder, or more friendly, than the "great lady," and when the car drove on with Roger Upton an additional passenger, it was understood that Roger or someone would take it, or another of the Cockleview cars, to Lambyre Road that evening to fetch the two Greenfields to dinner that night.

From what Roger Upton had told Adoline, Jack was a man and a gentleman, and to do Adoline justice she admired men and gentlemen when they were good looking, young and strong, far more than she did the effete specimens of tame cattery who had filled her boudoir before the war.

Inspirited, charmed beyond herself, Mabel forgot her natural parsimony and bought four pounds of salmon for lunch. "You'll pay for that, dear," she said. "We are dining out, and that will be a save."

Dining out! And at Cockleview! Mabel walked on air, and tilted her nose up with an abandonment to self-satisfaction and exultant and contemptuous derision of the dowdy frumps who had snubbed her.

She looked Mrs. Powter full in the face, and did not respond to the condescending nod which was awarded her with grudging reluctance.

"Did you evah!" wheezed the bank manager's wife to the widow of an admiral who was tottering beside her. "The insolence of the wommun! I don't believe it is her husband at all! Deah, deah! What are we coming to, heah at Cocklemath?"

"Stee a minnut," said Mrs. Bompas, the admiral's widow. "I see eggs are a farden cheaper heah than at my deery wommuns. I will order them to send me up one."

And the two feminine autocrats toddled along the streets they thought they owned. Each felt a little dazed. Such a shock as to be cut by a woman who had only been in the town three years, and who was not "in society," was unknown to them.

"What *am* I to wear to-night?" said Mabel.

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER

THE afternoon post at Cocklemouth is delivered about six o'clock, and, although the car from Cockleview was not expected before half-past seven, Mabel was already revelling in the occupation of attiring herself for the dinner, when the feeble imitation of the true postman's knock, of which alone the post-girl was capable, sounded through the little house.

Gladys was attending on her mistress, and Mabel heard her husband go to the door and return to the boudoir. Presently she heard his shout.

"How like a man!" she thought impatiently. "As if I could run down in the middle of dressing!"

Again Jack's voice was heard shouting to his wife. Then he called Beatie, who ran to him mumbling about her lessons, although her father had told her that she was to have a holiday while he remained at home. "Run up and tell your mother I want her," said Jack.

And Beatie, who had endeavoured in vain to persuade her mother to permit her to be present at the tiring, ran upstairs to do her mission with better will than she was wont to display.

She burst into Mabel's bedroom. "Oh, mummy," she commenced——

"You know I dislike your rushing in when I am dressing," said Mabel, petulantly. "What is it now?"

"Oh, well," sniffed Beatie, "father told me. He wants you."

"Bless the man, he knows I am busy dressing. What is it, dear?"

"I think it is a letter. He is reading a great long one in the buddy, and he looks so funny."

"Oh, tell him he must come up here."

"Is the servant with her?" asked Jack, when Beatie delivered her message.

"Yes, daddy. She's hooking mummy up behind."

Jack took two or three strides across the diminutive room, frowning, and with an air of puzzlement.

"I 'specks she would go if you went up, daddy," suggested the little girl.

"I 'specks she will," concurred her father, a little grimly.

He resumed the perusal of the sheets of M.S., which he held.

"Who's it from, daddy?" asked Beatie.

"No one you know. There. You run away, dear." Then suddenly his face relaxed and he burst out laughing. "It can't be a practical joke," he said. "Beatie, did you ever hear of an Aunt Sapphire?"

"No, never. Oh, daddy, have you found a new aunt? I hope not."

Beatie had no affection for the aunts she did know, and no desire to increase their number.

Still chuckling, Jack made his way upstairs, and tapped at his wife's door.

"Oh, come in." Mabel said, and Jack entered the room as Gladys passed out of it.

"Well, Jack, what is it?" asked Mabel testily. "I hate to be interrupted when I'm dressing, and goodness knows I have not had any need to dress since I came here. Now that I have a chance to enjoy myself——"

"That's all right. But this is the rummiest game I ever knew. Have you a sister Sapphire?"

In perfect honesty, Mabel replied in the negative. She did not associate the disowned half-sister Sara Slack with the name of Sapphire.

"Well, listen, and tell me what you make of it. It is addressed here to Captain and Mrs. J. Greenfield. Funny it should turn up just as I'm home on leave. Just listen."

"'Dear brother and sister.' I say, Mabel, who the devil can it be? What does it mean?"

"It can't be uncle or any of my aunties," said Beatie, who had slipped in silently behind her father.

"Oh," cried Mabel, "you run away, dear, and find something to play with. Your father and I are busy just now."

"But I don't want to," protested the child, tossing her pigtail.

"Here, you clear out when you're told."

"Shan't go," said the charming child.

Jack took her quietly but firmly by the elbow, and in spite of her kicks and screams thrust her from the room.

"You'll have to give that child a lesson," said Jack to his wife, when they were alone together.

"Oh, very well. But do get on with the letter. Is it a practical joke?"

"I don't think so. Here goes. 'It may surprise you to learn of my wedding with your sister Sapphire.' Sister Sapphire, you have not got a sister Sapphire, have you?"

"No. Oh! I wonder——" She stopped herself from saying what was in her mind, but a vague suspicion arose in her. Could it be that her half-sister, Sara Slack, of whom none of the Lightfoots ever talked, had assumed the name of Sapphire? She remembered hearing her mother say that Sara had always hated her name.

"Wonder what?" asked Jack.

"Oh, never mind. Go on, dear, and make haste. I shall never be dressed in time!"

"It's very funny though. Well, here goes. 'Sapphire. I bless the day when I first met her in the saloon bar of the Goat and Compasses, Whitechapel Road, and bless that more when I persuaded her to change the name of Slack for Teague.'"

"It *is* Sara Slack!" cried Mabel.

"Who on earth's that? She can't be your sister."

"She's my half-sister. You know mother was married to a man named John Slack before she married father. He died many years ago leaving this woman surviving him. We have nothing to do with her. Even mother never mentions her."

"Undesirable, I suppose," said Jack, who thought none the better of his mother-in-law for cutting her own daughter.

"Oh, awful, I believe." Poor Mabel did not wish to reveal the fact that the last thing her mother had heard of Sara was that she was serving as a barmaid in the East End of London.

"She doesn't seem to have forgotten you," retorted Jack, with a grin. "Perhaps this chap doesn't mean any harm. But he's got pretty fair cheek to call us dear brother and sister when he's never seen either of us."

Jack was no upstart; no snob who had to keep reminding himself of his position lest other people forgot it. But there was nothing he hated more than a liberty.

He recommenced reading the letter. "'A man never had a sweeter wife nor could not have. She can't make my close same as my first, and she won't do no washing, though I've offered to buy her a wringer as good as money can get. But I must not grumble. She is that young and innocent, twenty-eight and me thirty-nine.'"

"Oh!" cried Mabel. "She must be forty if she is a day!"

"Well, that's her look out," remarked Jack. He continued. "'There ain't nothing I stint her in. And she is that loving! I thank God for her.' Seems a good hearted, simple sort of chap too, doesn't he?"

"I think he must be a terrible man."

"Oh, why? He's not cultured, certainly. However, let's get on. 'She call me "dad," bless her dear heart, and I call her my blessed mammy, and do hope and pray as a cradle will be wanted soon, for I never had no luck with my first venture, and she shall have one lined with satin if she likes.' These domestic revelations are interesting, eh what? Er. 'She get that low when I'm away that I shall have to think about giving up a seafaring life.'

"So the man's a sailor, is he? That explains his simplicity. 'She say as she could manage a shop. But there ain't no call for that, for I can get a ship any time at forty pound a month while the war last. I've been torpedoed three times and don't care a damn, and done rare work salving in the Adratic, and lost all my kit coming home through France, and the Admiralty won't pay.'

"Forty pounds a month! He must be a captain anyhow. On a cargo vessel, I suppose. He does not seem to have enough education for the skipper of a passenger ship. Four hundred and eighty a year. But, I suppose, he is not in commission all the year round. Still he must be good at his work to get a screw like that. Your half-sister does not seem to have done so badly for herself. Let's get on. 'I shall sail soon, if my sweet can bear me going. I long to see you both and shake you by the hand, Jack, and kiss my pretty sister Mabel, for Sapphire say she is pretty, or was when she last saw her.' I say, Mabel, that's coming it a bit strong, isn't it? You tell me you've never seen this woman or her husband?"

"I saw her once when I was about ten years old.

That's all. Of course, I've never seen this horrible man."

"He's a bit rough, but he may be quite a good sort. Hallo though. This won't do. I had not got as far as this downstairs. 'If my ship sail from Plymouth or the Bristol Channel, I'll step off at Cocklemouth, on the way down, and stop a night with you. I know in your kind hearts you would like me to stop longer, but I shan't have the time this journey. Better luck next time, as the saying goes. You don't want to put yourselves out. A camp bed will do me, and anything to eat that's going. I eat hearty, but I ain't dellikit in my feeding. I send you a photo we had took after we was spliced, and I hope you will return the compliment and send me yours, dear Jack and Mabel.' Well, I'm hanged! 'We are captains all, you and me, brother Jack. It makes you feel comrade-like, don't it?'

"Well, I can't say I exactly experience that feeling at present. But look here. What on earth shall we do? I should hate to hurt the poor chap's feelings, and, I'm afraid, if he came here he couldn't be off seeing that we are hardly as enthusiastic about the relationship as he is. But I'll finish the letter before we talk about it."

"Do make haste then, Jack," said Mabel. "I know I shan't have time to finish dressing before the car comes for us."

She seemed to roll those words, "the car comes for us," on her tongue as though to savour their delicious taste.

Then she continued. "He must not come here. How awful this should happen just now that we have got to know the Horrexes! Oh, Jack! Just think if he were to come here and be with us when we met any of them! He wouldn't see he was in the way."

"Not a bit," laughed Jack. "The simple fellow would be as happy as a king, and would think that we were proud to exhibit him as a brother, unless we simply choked him off. It is a bit awkward. Perhaps we could palm him off on Lucy."

Mabel's face brightened. "There is that," she said. "I'm glad now we asked her to come. She might meet him at the door, and tell him we had gone away, on the moor or somewhere. But never mind that now. Do finish the letter, and leave me alone to get on with my dressing."

"Right oh. Er—er—'Sapphire say as it's quite a coincidence as Mabel and her both married captains.' Sounds as if you'd got a brace each, what? 'It won't be long before I sail, for the money is running out; my first wife's relations done me in proper and robbed me a treat. A hundred and twenty pound at least they drawed out of the bank when my poor wife couldn't no more sign her name than she could dance. And all her julery as I wanted for my dear, and a lot of my furniter. Me and Sapphire went across to old Erin and see the home all spoilt, and then I sold up what was left, for Sapphire won't live out of London, and say she will learn me London so as I can find my way about by myself, which I can't now, always taking her as pilot. They stole a beautiful gold watch and chain as no queen could desire a better, but I've brought my darling another, and a gold locket for my hair, with dimonds on it, and a bracelet, and give four pounds for a Panama hat as I know the very place where they are made, and she look a treat in it; and I spent a hundred and fifty nigh on in furniter for this flat, where the people are funny and seem swelled heads as if I should bite, and as I hope you will shortly see for yourselves, dear brother Jack and sister Mabel, and I set a lawyer on them, but he could not get anything out of them saying as my first wife give them to them. If Mabel is like her sister, all I can say is you are another lucky one to have got her. Innocent! And loving!

All the money is in her name at the bank, and she draw out as I tell her and give me what I want, though after I've had one good bust ashore, I settle down quiet, and it was when I was having one as I first met her, and I believe she saved me from being robbed, as courageous as a lion as I tell her. I told the people at the bank what I thought of her and as she was my wife, and proud and happy I was though she look so young for me, and they were surprised as so young and sweet a darling should have fallen to my lot. At the shipping office, where she showed me the way, after I told her where the street was, as if she knowed London by heart as she do, it was the same. What I think is that all should be in her name!'

"Isn't that like a sailor. It reminds one of the Captain Marryatt men, who chucked their prize money into their wives' or sweethearts' laps when they went ashore, doesn't it?"

Mabel thought inwardly that it was certainly a good trait. She would not have objected had this practice been as common with the officers in the army as with sailors.

"I don't think the man can be quite sane," she said. "But, for heaven's sake, finish the letter. Is there much more of it?"

"Not very much. Seems fond of letter writing, doesn't he?"

"'I'll wire you when I'm starting down your way. If you, brother Jack, like ship's tobacco, I'll bring some down. Also send a joint of meat. I get a joint sent regular to mammy by the butcher as supplied my last ship at Port Talbot, Bristol Channel, where I expect I shall sail from next time again. I can always take home plenty of stores from the ship, so mammy never go wanting, nor she ought not. She laugh, and say it's worth while being a captain's wife to get a leg of mutton when she want one. But all captains can't do the trick, can they, brother Jack? Still you and sister Mabel shall never want if I can help it, so you've only to write and tell your fancy.'

"Upon my word, Mabel, this poor chap means well enough. I don't believe that he imagines that he is inferior to us in any way, and if you come to it, I don't know that he is. Certainly, he is of as much use to his country as I am, if not more."

Mabel, too, was struggling against the call of her parsimony. If only she, too, could get a joint of meat sent her once a week from Port Talbot, she would be able to save a good deal from her house-keeping money, though goodness knows she scrimped and screwed enough as it was. So long as Jack was at home she knew that she could not take advantage of this man's offer, unless she admitted him to the intimacy which he evidently took as a matter of course. And she could not do that, even if Jack were willing. After Jack was gone, if this captain, whatever his name was, wrote her with a similar offer, she would try to devise some scheme whereby she could get the meat without associating with the man. She could see nothing disgraceful or mean in such conduct. Many women would not.

But have the sailor at Cocklemouth, she would not.

"That may be so," she replied, sharpened by her anxiety. "I daresay a ploughman just now is of great value to his country. But one does not ask him to stay on that account."

"Well," said her husband. "I'll finish this. 'I hope this will find you both well as, thank God, this leaves me at present, and so is Sapphire. I do look forward to shaking you by the hand— '

"Rum how fond some people are of that expression," commented Jack. "Does he think anyone wants to shake me by the tail?"— 'and kiss my sister Mabel and your little ones, if you have any, which I don't know, but am sure you ought to seeing you're a captain same as me, though I haven't.' Why a captain should especially be a father, I don't know. Never mind, he means well. Er—er—'So with love to you both, and a kiss, and lots of 'em, to Mabel and to your little ones, if any, from their fond uncle, I remain, your affectionate brother, Captain Brian Teague. Mammy wish me to send her card as well as the photo.'

"He's put a lot of crosses for kisses. Well, I'm hanged!"

"I suppose this is the card," said Mabel, stooping and picking up the smaller of the two bits of pasteboard, which had fallen from the letter to the ground. This was about half as large again as ladies' cards usually are. "Good gracious!" cried Mabel. "Look at it, Jack!"

Printed in old English letters, in the centre of the pasteboard, was the inscription, "Mrs. Captain Brian Teague, 189b Pickering Mansions, Pickthall Road, London, W."

While Mabel was gazing aghast at the card, Jack retrieved the photograph. This was of half-plate size, and showed a stout, stocky, clean shaven, grey-haired man, dressed in the uniform of a captain in the mercantile marine, seated, while, standing at his back, her left hand affectionately curling its wrist round her husband's shoulder, was a stout, coarse-featured woman, whose large black eyes alone bore any resemblance to Mabel's lineaments, if eyes can be called by that name. The man's mouth was small and full lipped; his chin very square and strong; his cheeks well fleshed, and, though the print was not coloured, they gave the impression of being florid. The eyes were probably blue, and were wide, with the look of a mariner's eyes. The impression gathered was one of extreme obstinacy, modified a little by kindness and simplicity. On the whole, the man's appearance was much superior to the woman's. For the latter looked coarse, almost blowsy. The features were not bad, but were exaggerated, and too fleshy. The nose was straight, but bulged clumsily. The mouth was wide, a hard grin showing obviously false teeth. The chin was strong, but fat and double. The eyes were the best part, and in early life might have been beautiful. Now they were hard eyes, hungry, unashamed, the eyes of the horseleech. How any man could be so simple as to believe that her age was twenty-eight was extraordinary. For she looked well over forty. On her bosom was a huge gold locket, round her neck a gold chain; and a gold watch, depending from it, was pinned to her breast. The fingers of the hand resting on the man's shoulder displayed two or three flamboyant rings.

Jack studied the photograph with some interest.

"Look at this card, Jack!" said Mabel, plaintively. "Isn't it awful? You'd have thought anyone knew better than to put the captain in like that."

Jack laughed, and handed over the photograph in exchange for the card.

"What do you make of 'em?" he asked.

"Twenty-eight!" cried Mabel. "Why she looks fifty here. I should not have known her. But really, Jack, the man looks better than his letter. It is not a bad face, is it?"

"Not by any means. But I should think he has the devil of a temper. Old girl, we are in for ructions, make no mistake about it. That chap means what he says. We don't know what she has told him about us, and it is quite clear that he expects to be a welcome guest, and that he has not the remotest idea that you and your people are not on the best of terms with his wife. How she has explained it doesn't matter. There is the fact. He's kind enough in his way. But I should say that if he is upset he loses control of himself, and is a nasty man to come up against. If it were not that I hate to hurt his feelings, I'd write him such a letter that he'd give up all idea of coming down, or even of seeing us at any time. But I don't like to do that. The chap looks a decent sort in a way. Of course, it is all bunkum about his age as it is about hers. He's nearer sixty than fifty. I daresay he is a very interesting man, and I should be charmed to meet him but for the circumstances. He'd be all right to smoke a pipe with and to yarn with. But as a housemate, imagining that he is a long-lost brother sort of relation, I admit he loses charm."

"Well, never mind that now, Jack. We can talk all that over when we come back from Cockleview. Do leave me now, or I shall never get dressed in time. Perhaps he won't be able to come here before he sails, and if he sails he may be drowned!"

"Well, I'm blowed if you don't look at things in a pleasant way," replied Jack, feeling a little disgusted with his wife. "I hope the poor chap won't be drowned."

"Oh, let him be what you like," cried Mabel, distractedly. "You must leave me now, Jack."

"But look here——"

"Oh, go!" cried Mabel, and, unable to wait any longer, she pressed her finger to the bell button to summon Gladys, and thrust her husband towards the door.

Jack went.

CHAPTER VI

TOMPKINS DISCONSOLATE

SOON after half-past seven, Roger Upton drove the splendid Rolls Royce belonging to Adoline Horrex up Lambyre Road. Had he looked to the left, when he had swung round and was honking to give notice of his arrival, he would have seen Tompkins standing in his garden, which climbed up from the road at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees.

He had strolled out to pick caterpillars, and, incidentally, to keep an eye on Mabel's gate. Now he stood looking down, his pale eyes goggling. He had been trying to pluck up courage to confront Jack Greenfield, and was a little disconcerted by his unwonted lack of self-assurance. The sight of the car overwhelmed him. What ? Had Mrs. Greenfield, or "Mabel" as he called her to himself, and, occasionally, even to her face when he was alone with her and Beatie, had she friends who owned a car like that ? Ah ! He recognised the car. His surprise grew greater. Certainly he must push his friendship with Mabel and her husband. Greenfield must be a much "bigger pot" than he had imagined. If he knew himself (here he drew up his meagre figure and grinned), it would not be long before he was introduced to Mrs. Horrex and her "swell set."

"He must 'ave come to the wrong 'ouse," Tompkins muttered, unable to believe at once that the angel he had entertained unawares was so very angelic.

But when he saw Upton stoop forward to switch off the current, get down from the car, and go through the gate at the top of the flight of steps tumbling down to Mabel's front door, he was convinced that there was no mistake. Stolidly he stood at the farthest point of his garden nearest the road, and stolidly kept his goggling eyes fixed on the gate. At all events, he would try to get a bow from Mabel as she drove off. Even a bow from such exalted quarters would be something.

Although the fall of the steps to the front door was so steep that even from his elevation he could see nothing of the threshold, he was warned of the egress of the party of three by the sound of voices, chattering gaily. "Bless me!" he muttered. "They seem to be on good terms too, most familecr!"

Mabel looked her best, swathed about the head with a superb old lace shawl, black, with a golden thread running through the hem. Her face was more vivacious than he had ever seen it, than he had thought it could be, and one could see by the way in which she was swaying her head on her long graceful neck that she was preening herself before Upton. Tompkins hated the major for it, and he frowned as he watched Mabel seat herself beside Upton in the front of the car; watched the solicitous way in which the latter drew a fur rug round her lithe limbs; watched the pleasure with which these attentions were received, the smiling face, the expressive look. Jack was smiling as cheerfully. Not one of the party even turned an eye towards him. Was he not to get his bow, so that the "swell" who had brought the car might ask who he was?"

Jack had caught a glimpse of his straining eyes while climbing the top of the steps, and purposely refrained from looking uphill to the left. Mabel never thought of Tompkins, so absorbed was she in her delight.

"Hang it," said Upton, laughing at himself. "What an ass I am. I've got in without cranking the car."

"I'll do that," said Jack.

"You see, Mrs. Greenfield," said Upton, "that it is dangerous for a chauffeur to have a charming lady beside him."

And Mabel flushed and burgeoned with pleasure. This was the society for which she was born. These were the men she liked, and who appreciated her; men who could pay a pretty compliment lightly, as a matter of course.

"I'll *make* 'em look," muttered Tompkins.

"But have I time?" was his second thought. For already Jack was out of the car and stooping over the lever.

Swiftly Tompkins ran uphill to his flower garden where some roses still bloomed. Swiftly he cut half-a-dozen beautiful blossoms, and reckless of thorns, though his fingers were bleeding, he swept a knife over their stems, swished a bit of bast round them (he always had bast in the pocket of his gardening coat), and dashed headlong down to the road, bearing the perfumed tribute ostentatiously aloft.

But as he stumbled on a loose stone in his path, nearly falling against the barbed wire, which edged the bottom of his garden, he heard the purr of the engine as Roger pressed down the accelerator before letting in the clutch. He almost fell out into the road, in time to see the car gliding off.

"Hi, hi," he yelled, never handicapped by false modesty, or modesty of any other kind. "Hi, hi. Stop."

Jack studiously kept his eyes in front, and Mabel bent to listen to something Upton was saying. They both heard the agonised cries behind them, and both determined to ignore them; Jack, because he thought that Tompkins wanted a lesson badly, and Mabel, because she feared lest Tompkins might somehow place her at a disadvantage beside the major. She was a little uneasy, for she felt sure that Tompkins would be hurt. But she told herself that she could afford to do without him, "if he can do without me."

"That chap shouting to us?" asked Upton, throwing a careless look over his shoulder, but at once swerving round to the right down a rather steep incline, so that it was necessary for him to watch his driving.

"Oh, never mind," said Mabel. "He's left off now."

For Tompkins, seeing that no notice was taken of his shouts, and that the pursuit of a Rolls Royce on foot was hardly likely to be profitable, had stopped short in his tracks.

"They did not hear me," he told himself.

"I'll take these in to Beatie now," he said. "Perhaps she will be able to tell me what it all means. But I must run up and get her the sweets too. She won't care for roses."

He gave a last spiteful look at the corner round which the car had just whirled Mabel, and then went up to his house, whence he presently emerged with the sweets for Beatie in his pocket. In his hand he carried the roses he had picked.

As he crossed the road to Mabel's gate, the "telegraph girl" sprang from her bicycle within two yards of him, and ran into the gate whither he was bound just in front of him.

Both metaphorically and literally he pricked his ears. Mabel and her husband were out, Beatie was at home. Probably the latter would open the telegram. Would she need advice on its contents? If so, would she apply for that advice to him, or to Gladys? If to him, well he might learn something of interest.

Instead of going round to the windows of the boudoir and letting himself in in his usual way, he waited behind the telegraph girl till the door was opened.

"She's out." Gladys snapped at Tompkins, who had not made a friend of her by offerings, of coin of the realm or any other nature.

"This is right, ain't it ?" asked the telegraph girl, bracing herself for the encounter though she was not more than fifteen or sixteen. "What a time you keep people waitin'. Anyone might miss a train or what not while I've been ringin' here."

"Oh, you want to grouse, you do," retorted Gladys. "Give it 'ere."

She snatched the telegram, and read its address. "All right," she said. "'Ere," she added, looking at Tompkins, "if you're goin' in to see Beatie you can take it. They 'on't be 'ome till late. Gorn to Mrs. 'Orrex's to dinner they 'ave."

"I tell you it's all right," she repeated to the telegraph girl. "What're ye standin' there for like a stuck pig ?"

"Oh ! You *are* !" cried the messenger, tossing her head. "I'm glad you're not my servant."

"The idea !" snorted Gladys at the retreating figure of the girl, who felt that she could not improve upon her last words and was retiring in good order up the steps.

"Are you goin' in or ain't you ?" said Gladys to Tompkins. "I shall never get out to-night."

"I'll take it in," replied Tompkins.

He strolled along the passage, hat on head, "Beatie," he bleated, in his croaking voice. "Beatie. Where are you ?"

"Oh, bother," thought Beatie. "Here he is again. But, perhaps, he has brought something more. Wonder what made him ring the bell. He never does."

She swung her long legs off the sofa which stretched all along one of the walls of the boudoir, and cried. "I'm in the buddy."

Tompkins made his way to the well-known room without troubling to remove his hat. He really was a most ill-mannered person, was Tompkins.

"Here is a telegram just come for your father," he said. "At least, it may be for him. It is addressed, 'Greenfield.'"

"'Praps it's for me," suggested Beatie, swinging her pigtails, and raising her eyebrows. "And p'raps it isn't. But it may be, mayn't it? I'll open it."

She opened the envelope, and then, indeed, her eyebrows went up.

"And I've brought you some caramels," said Tompkins, peeping over her shoulder at the telegram.

"Oh, thank you," cried Beatie, seizing the packet he held out to her. "Oh, do look at this! Whatever does it mean?"

With feigned reluctance Tompkins took the oblong bit of paper. "But do you think your father would like me to read it?" he asked, having already skimmed the pencilled words with a side glance.

"Telegrams aren't private," sagely remarked the child. "And I don't know if I ought to let them know. Would you take it to them if you think they ought to have it?"

"Gad!" thought Tompkins. "Here is my chance. If I take it up to them they can hardly avoid introducing me to Mrs. Horrex. I think I'll say they ought to have it."

"Read it out to me," said Beatie as well as she could with her teeth clammed together with three caramels at once.

"'Greenfield 3 Lambyre——'

"Oh, never mind that. Read what it says."

"'Me and Sapphire staying Bristol to-night going on to you Monday brother Brian.'

"I suppose," said Tompkins," that your Uncle Brian is coming to see you on Monday. Perhaps your mother ought to know. Have you heard anything about it?"

"But I haven't got any Uncle Brian," said Beatie, screwing her eyes up and shaking her head till her pigtails weaved weird curves behind her back. "And I'm sure mummy does not expect anyone 'cept Aunt Lucy."

"But surely you must have an Uncle Brian," said the man. "Let me look again. Yes. It is signed brother Brian. Is he your mother's or your father's brother, dear?"

"Never heard of an Uncle Brian. Oh, Tommy, don't you fink we'd better *bofe* go and see what they say?"

This would hardly do. Tompkins thought that if Beatie went it would be easier for her father and mother to ask her in and ignore him. Whereas, if he took the telegram by himself they could hardly treat him as a menial messenger.

"I don't think your mamma would like you to come out so late as this," he suggested.

"Why, it's quite light, and I've often and often been on the beach or over at Raincombe with mummy later than this."

"But then there will be no one left in the house. I think I had better go and leave you to take care of the place, don't you?"

The notion of being left in charge was not without a certain fascination for the vain child. It was true that she had been left in charge before. But it had never been pointed out to her so clearly as Tompkins made it. She assumed an air of importance, and waggled her head affirmatively. "P'waps you're wight," she said.

"Very well. Then I will come back if I can to see that you are all right. Of course they may ask me to stay!" He coughed, and preened himself at the delightful possibility.

"If they do, I may not be able to return here before your mamma gets home."

He took the telegram, inserted it in its envelope, and slouched off, his hat still upon his head.

He strode up the hill as lightly as he could, breasting the long and steep rise to Cockleview with a buoyancy which was unusual for him. He had never been inside the grounds of Cockleview, and he was a little subdued by the time he reached the front door of the superb old mansion. The extent of the park-like grounds, the impressive size and style of the Georgian house, weakened his self-assurance in a way which surprised and disgusted him. In vain, he assured himself that he was as good as they. He did not feel it.

When he rang the bell and saw the doors open to him a vision of a huge vaulted hall, brilliantly lighted by electricity supplied by engines and dynamos belonging to the establishment, and filled with lounges, tables, divans, and easy chairs, all of which suggested comfort, luxury and unlimited expenditure, when he heard from some room opening into the hall the sound of laughter and of merry voices, the popping of corks, and the chink of china, glass and silver, his self-assertiveness deserted him, and he stammered in speaking to a radiant parlourmaid, who seemed to protest that she was condescending in acting in a menial capacity.

"Mumumissis Greenfield," he stuttered, cursing himself for the loss of his presence of mind at a time when he especially needed it.

The fair domestic glanced at him and placed him in a moment.

"She's at dinner," she said. "Will you send a message? Or if it is not important, can't you wait till she is at home again?"

"It is a telegram which has come for her."

"Oh! That? I'll give it to her. Who shall I say brought it?"

Inwardly Tompkins was cursing himself, asking himself why he put up with this slavey's impudence.

Anyhow, he thought, he ought to be able to make a better show than he was doing.

So he assumed his horrible leering grin, which quite startled the girl. "Give her Mr. Tompkins's compliments and explain that the telegram came soon after she left home. Say that Mr. Tompkins thought she might wish to have it, and that her daughter opened it."

"Oh, all right. Telegram brought by Mr. Tompkins. I'll send it in to her."

With that the fair Vera turned on her heels and shut the door in Tompkins's disconsolate face.

"Well!" he muttered, standing and looking at the closed portals with that demoniac gargoyle expression which he had worn when the car drove off. "Well!" he gasped, "I'm damned!"

CHAPTER VII

MABEL IN EXCELSIS

JACK GREENFIELD, sitting on the right of Adoline Horrex, turned his head to receive the telegram tendered him by one of the waitresses. "Who ?" he asked, in reply to the whispered communication that it had been brought up by Mr. Tompkins.

"Oh !" he said, on hearing the name repeated, "Tompkins !" He glanced at the message, and then said. "Did the man give it in open ?"

Again the waitress whispered. "Mr. Tompkins's compliments, sir, and Miss Greenfield opened it."

"No bad news, I hope," said Adoline kindly.

"Oh, no," replied Jack, "only a possible unexpected visitor on Monday."

Mabel, who was sitting on the other side of the table, beside old Horrex, who had chosen to dine with his wife's party that evening, glanced at Jack, and he sent her the telegram.

At another time she might not have been so well able to conceal her indignation. But just then she was riotously jubilant. Her welcome had been warm, and her new friends chatted to her like old ones. In fact, Adoline had already discovered in her a more or less sympathetic nature. Nor was she entirely mistaken. There was a good deal which the two women held in common, although this could hardly have been said in Mabel's Herringhaven days. The treatment she had received from the Cocklemouth women had caused her to rebel against convention. She had utterly failed to penetrate the provincially conventional strongholds of the feminine society of the place, and was ready and eager to make one of a party who set the "old tabbies," as Mrs. Horrex called the worthy dames of Cocklemouth, at defiance. Both women were insatiable in their hunger for male admiration, and both were temperamentally incapable of giving the world, or any valuable possession, for love. Each was an adept at philandering, and neither was at all likely to kick over the traces in reality. Hitherto, Mabel had not met a woman of the class to which Adoline Horrex belonged, and she felt that she had at last found her proper sphere.

Adoline, for her part, recognised in Mabel a woman who might help her to amuse herself. But for her own *entourage* there was hardly any one in the town with whom she could associate with pleasure.

The townsfolk would have said that this was because she was so "improper." But this would be an entirely erroneous view to take. There is probably no town in England where greater licence prevails than at Cocklemouth. Before the war residents had figured in the London rags, which provide records of social garbage for those who enjoy that diet, with a frequency disproportioned to the size of the townlet.

Nevertheless, except for one notorious intrigue in which the German wife of an elderly magnate was implicated, the irregularities were all under the rose. On the surface, Cocklemouth was the abode of conventional intolerance. Secretly, it was extraordinarily vicious.

It pretended to be scandalised by the behaviour of Adoline Horrex and her set, whereas that maligned lady and her friends were infinitely more genuinely virtuous than their calumniators. For they belonged to a class of women which is greatly on the increase, a class which delights in flouting conventionality in any form. To be just to this class, it is necessary to understand its members. The apparent lack of restraint in their manners with men means nothing. Privately, they rarely lose their heads or their honour, and it fares ill with any man who is deceived by their frank disregard of appearances and endeavours to treat them as though they were what they pretend to be. Many a woman of this class has found herself in the divorce court, and heard a verdict unjustly given against her, because she is misunderstood. Evidence, which would be ample to prove the guilt of the ordinary woman, is totally inadequate to convict a woman like Adoline Horrex. Women of her kind do things out of sheer bravado, things which look horribly compromising to those who cannot understand, but which are really points in favour of their innocence. It is only fair to this class to remember that the extravagance of its members often arises from their disgust at the hypocrisy which they see rampant in too many places, and that while they sometimes behave as though they had lost all sense of modesty, they are in truth good hearted, benevolent and genuinely virtuous women. I do not say that a general acceptance of their views, that a general imitation of their example is desirable. It may be that the reason why the class is on the increase can be found in the strain set up by the war. If so, the time will come when the transient nature of the growing fashion will be apparent. But in order to understand the real nature of Adoline Horrex, Mabel Greenfield and their like, all these points must be taken into consideration. Whatever were their faults, the former was innocent of the great vice of hypocrisy, though, perhaps, scarce so much can be said for Mabel, who was doubtless swayed by the wealth and position of her new friends.

Mabel then, finding herself petted by her hostess and admired by the men, was more radiant than her husband had ever seen her, and displayed qualities which he had been ignorant were latent in her.

She laughed as she read the telegram. "Who brought it?" she asked, puzzled because she knew that Gladys would not have taken the trouble to go up there in her own time, and that Beatie was too lazy to leave her home. "T." said Jack. And Mabel laughed again.

Tompkins seemed to her very far off, as she sat at the long table in the midst of compliments and such a profusion and display of table equipment as she had never before seen. Poor Tompkins, who had gone up, fatuously hoping to be introduced, perhaps to be asked to join the diners, now seemed to the woman, who had certainly admitted him to her intimacy twenty-four hours ago, to belong to a different world! Even the threatened visit of the mysterious Brian Teague and her half-sister Sara, or Sapphire as she now called herself, failed to depress her. But she was not blind to the possibilities which lay in their coming. She must bind herself to the society in which she found herself, which was so congenial to her, as firmly as possible; so firmly, indeed, as to make the ties strong enough to stand any strain which might be put upon them by the undesired visitors.

So she collected herself, and used all her fascination to the best of her ability with such success that before she was helped into the Rolls Royce, by half-a-dozen eager hands, to be driven home by Upton, Adoline Horrex had called her "dear," and invited her to make one of a party which intended to invade the Cocklemouth tennis club on Monday afternoon. "Tell you what," said Adoline, as she pressed Jack's hand with lingering warmth, "you'd better both come to lunch. I'll get one of the boys to take the car down to fetch you, if I can't do it myself."

"I'm not quite sure if I shall be able," Jack began to say, with the thought of Teague in his mind.

"Oh, well, you can let Mabel come, and you must turn up at the club if you can. But come to lunch, too, if you can manage it."

And Jack, who was a little fascinated by the attentions which had been paid to him, replied that he would try to do his best.

It was a joyous night. Captain, the Hon. Lance Perryman, a comedian and an acrobat, had twisted himself into the most extraordinary contortions while he was singing his comic songs in the drawing-room after dinner. That he was the son of a very wealthy earl did not detract from the enthusiasm of the applause which greeted his performance. And Mabel flattered herself that both he, and Colonel Percy Burnside, a famous lady killer and henchman of Adoline's, had fallen under the charm of her fascination.

Jack's Daneshire song had gone very well, and altogether both he and Mabel had spent a very enjoyable time. So enjoyable that it was not till Roger Upton had taken his leave, after driving them home and entering their house for a good-night drink, that the Greenfields brought themselves to face what was coming to them.

As soon as Beatie had been sent to bed, Mabel flung herself on the couch in her boudoir, and said. "We may as well have it out now, Jack. I suppose there is no way of stopping their coming."

"Don't know where they are staying at Bristol, you see," objected Jack, helping himself to a little drink out of the whiskey bottle.

"How can we explain them ?" asked Mabel. "Could they be humble friends or anything ?"

"That infernal Tompkins saw the wire. He'll have noticed that the ass signed himself brother Brian."

"Oh, Jack, he would not read a telegram not addressed to him!"

"Bet you he did. Ask Beatie."

"Oh, I can't go up. Call her down, Jack; it is so warm, it won't hurt her."

And Jack, believing that his wife would be able to get the truth out of the sullen child more easily than he, did as he was asked. Presently Beatie re-entered the room.

"You woke me up," she complained.

"I'm glad you had the sense to put your dressing-gown and slippers on, dear," said the fond mother. "Daddy's sorry he had to wake you, but I want to ask you something. Did you open the telegram?"

"Yes, mummy. I fought I'd better."

"How came you to think of sending it up?"

"Vat was Tommy, mummy. He said he fought you should have it. He came in wif ve telegwam."

"You can talk better than that if you like," said Mabel, impatiently.

"It's 'cos I'se so sleepy," explained the child.

"Oh, well, never mind. Mr. Tompkins read it then?"

"Yes. I asked him to. I couldn't make out about it. Has I an Uncle Brian? Tommy asked if I had and I said no."

"Good girl," said Mabel.

"I don't see that," said Jack. "The man will not hide his light under a bushel. You may be sure of that. He'll be the brother all right."

"Ven," asked Beatie," I *has* got an Uncle Bwian."

"No you've not," cried Mabel. "You wouldn't understand. But——oh never mind, perhaps he won't come."

"Won't he?" said Jack.

"Ven I told him wight?" asked Beatie.

"Yes, dear, quite right. Now run along up to bed again. We won't disturb you again."

And Beatie, who really was sleepy, retired to her bed.

"What do you think of this idea?" asked Mabel. "Wire Lucy in the morning that she must get here to-morrow some time. Then you and I will go to Cockleview on Monday, and leave her to receive them if they come. She can tell them we are away, and they will leave."

"Not they."

"But they'll have to."

"My dear girl, you don't appreciate that man's chin. Besides, he'd plague Lucy's life out with his questions. And you know she is no good at fibbing."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders. She looked about her with an air of discontent. How common and uncomfortable the little room seemed after Cockleview. Oh! She was meant to live with people like those with whom she had spent the evening. That was her real circle! Nothing should interfere with her becoming a close friend of Adoline. Not a dozen Brian Teagues and half-sister Saras.

"What do you propose then?" she asked, drawling and posing herself as a "study of languor."

"You must go to Horrexes. I'll stay here with Lucy to meet them, and see what I can do. But frankly, we shall have to put them up for one night, or risk an unpleasant scene. Look here, Mabs." He had not called her by that pet name for years, but she had even charmed her husband by her exhibition that night. "Look here, Mabs. Things may not be so bad as we think. I don't believe the man will be any worse than that old boy, what's his name, Cutwater, who was dining with us to-night. He's been a merchant skipper. By-the-bye, I've promised to look him up. But—you see it's the woman I'm really afraid of. It is the deuce and all her coming down too. He didn't say anything about that in the letter. Surely, she must know that you don't wish to have anything to do with her. It looks as if she had told her husband a pack of lies, and was forced to come down here when he suggested it, or give herself away. And if she gets an idea that you have got in with people like the Horrexes, she'll want to show herself off to them. She is intensely proud of her new position. I'm sure of that by the expression of her face in the photo. Then there's that card. And she will be furious at any suggestion that she is now not fit for the society of anyone. My God! She'll go leaving those awful cards about with 'Mrs. Captain Brian Teague' on 'em."

"Oh, Jack, *don't!*" cried Mabel.

"Then, *can* we wire from here to-morrow? I heard someone say to-night that the post office here is never open when you want it, and Sundays are bad days for wires at most provincial places."

"Can't we 'phone anyhow?"

"How could we get Lucy on the 'phone. It used not to be fitted at your father's place."

"He may have it now. You know he has made a lot of money lately, and has a government appointment connected with supplying the navy with something or other. They've got a 'phone at Cockleview, and I'm sure Mrs. Horrex would not mind our using it to-morrow."

"That's a good idea. Anyhow, Lucy may be a help."

"Major Upton is coming to-morrow morning, isn't he?" asked Mabel, who knew very well that he was. "He said something about borrowing a car and taking us for a spin. We might take Cockleview on the way."

"Right," agreed Jack. And, soon after, they retired to woo sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE next morning, a little before eleven o'clock, when Jack had finished his second after-breakfast pipe, he heard a sound of footsteps on the terrace outside the open windows of the boudoir. Turning to ascertain who it could be, for he knew that his wife and child were upstairs getting ready for the arrival of Roger Upton, he saw the ungainly figure of Tompkins halting on the point of entering. Tompkins wore the grotesque grin which he believed to be of a propitiatory nature, and carried a basket in which were two specimens of lettuces going to seed and a few withered looking French beans.

"Mornin', Captain," croaked Tompkins, widening his grin an inch or two. "Hoped I might catch you when I had seen my wife off to church. Hope you slept well."

Without waiting for an invitation, he strode into the room and held out his hand.

Jack nodded, and rose very reluctantly to greet his unwelcome visitor. He managed to evade the hand without being guilty of great rudeness. He felt that he would have to put the man in his place, and he disliked the notion of it, for he loathed the appearance of incivility to a guest.

"Yes, thank you," he replied.

"That's good. Thought the missis might be glad of a few vejtibles. She in ?"

"We are just going out. But really you should not trouble to bring things round, you know."

"Lor! They're nothin' to me! You must come and see my garden. All the work of my own hands! I say, Captain, look here. I mentioned it to you last night, you may remember. Have you thought of anything which will kill caterpillars without injuring the green stuff?"

"I'm afraid I know of nothing."

"Well, you can tell me how to make Apenta anyhow, can't you?"

Tompkins bent forward and smiled, persuasively as he believed.

"I daresay you can find the prescription in some book of family medicine. I really don't remember. Do you know, I fancy you must be under a misapprehension about me. I am an analytical chemist, you know."

"Yes. You could analyse Apenta, couldn't you? I'll tell you what. I'll bring you round a drop if you have none in the house, and then you can analyse it for me, hay?"

"I am sorry. I have no laboratory here."

"But couldn't you work it out with what's in the house, saucepans and things?"

Fortunately for Jack at that moment a motor horn honked outside in the road. He took a shot in the dark and hoped that it might reach its mark.

"You will excuse me," he said. "I expect that is a friend of mine come to take us for a spin."

"Oh!" cried Tompkins, brightening. "Only too happy to meet any friend of yours."

"I must really ask you to excuse me," said Jack; ignoring the other's words. "Perhaps you won't mind going out by the window as you came in that way."

"I'll take my basket, please," said Tompkins, hesitating. Then he plucked up courage. "But," he said, "I don't mind waiting."

"There will be nothing to wait for. We shall be going out at once."

Tompkins kept his ground. The slip-shod feet of Gladys, in her house shoes, were audible approaching the door, followed by the firm tread of a man.

"Major Hupton, sir," said Gladys, opening the door for Roger, who came in on her heels.

"Thank goodness it is only Roger," thought Jack. "I know him well enough to explain this blighter to him."

"Hallo, Jack," said Upton. "I've been up to Cockleview, and Mrs. Horrex has lent me the Rolls Royce with orders to take you for a spin and then up to lunch."

"Right," replied Jack. "You didn't turn up for a swim this morning."

"No. I was rather slack this morning."

"A dip would have done you all the good in the world. But what about Beatie? Can she come in the car?"

"Of course she can."

"But I don't like taking her up there to lunch."

"Oh," intervened Tompkins, seizing on a chance. "Let Beatie come to us. I'll look after her, and p'raps you will call for her in the afternoon and see my garden."

He beamed upon the other two men, and looked expectantly at Upton.

"You don't know Mr. Tompkins, Roger," said Jack, wearily. "Mr. Tompkins, Major Upton."

"Proud to meet you," said Tompkins, feeling that his call had been worth while. "I saw you last night in a beautiful motor car. Must have cost a lot of money."

"I really don't know. It is not mine," said Upton, with a look at Jack which plainly asked how on earth he had found up this bounder.

Jack managed to wink at him unseen by that bounder, and the two officers grinned at each other.

Jack felt in rather an awkward position. It would solve a difficulty if he let Beatie go to the Tompkinses. But how could he permit that without acquiescing in an intimacy which he was determined to break. He knew that it would be inadvisable to take the little girl to Cockleview.

While he and his wife could enjoy themselves there the child would be out of place. Oh, hang it all, why need he stand on ceremony with a man like this ?

" It is very good of you to be willing to take Beatie," he said to Tompkins. " But I won't trouble you. It is possible that a visitor may arrive for me to-day, and someone ought to be at home. Beatie would do."

" But," protested Tompkins, very foolishly, " the telegram said Monday."

" My good man," said Jack, losing all patience. " I am afraid that I have neither the time nor the inclination to explain to you all the details of my domestic arrangements. And we must not keep Major Upton waiting longer. Good-morning."

Even Tompkins could not get out of that. He was flustered. He took up his basket with the vegetables still in it, and stood for a moment awkwardly. Then he said, " Well, you'll come and see my garden this afternoon. So I won't say good-bye, but oh revoy."

With a rather sickly smile he offered his hand to each of the officers in turn, who took it, let it go as though they did not know what to do with it, and then bowed himself out of the window."

" Very glad to have made your acquaintance, Major," were his last words as he stepped out on to the terrace.

" Where the deuce did you pick that up ? " asked Upton, bursting out into a roar of laughter.

" I didn't," replied Jack, suddenly becoming solemn.

"I found it installed on apparently intimate terms. here. Aren't women funny ?"

On hearing the arrangements which had been made, Mabel reminded her husband that the first thing to do was to endeavour to get into touch with Lucy on the telephone. "Look here," said Jack, "I vote we tell Roger the whole thing. He may be able to wangle it somehow. You see we can't go up to Cockleview now if we are going to lunch there, and the sooner we get at Lucy the better. It will take her all her time to get down to-night."

"What do you mean ?" asked Mabel. "Tell Major Upton about the Teagues ? Oh, Jack !"

"Why not. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! It is really too good to keep to ourselves, even if we had a chance of doing it. Roger may be able to help us."

"What is it, old man ?" asked the Major.

So then Jack told him the whole tale, showed him the merchant captain's letter, and explained the situation as well as he knew it, Roger roared with laughter over the letter, and the same idea struck him as had occurred to Jack on the previous night. "Tell you what we'll do," he said. "If the noble Brian Teague insists on staying here for a day or so, we'll put him on to old Cutwater ! You remember him at dinner last night. Lord, it will be worth a pony to hear 'em. Don't you worry, Mrs. Greenfield. We've all got undesirable relations somewhere. And this chap seems original anyway."

"It's his wife that I'm afraid of," said Mabel, who was delighted at the way in which Upton took the explanation, and saw in him a very valuable ally.

"We'll stir up General Verger at Lyemouth," said Upton at last. "He'll let us use his 'phone, and it won't take us half an hour to motor into Lyemouth."

General Verger had a military position of some importance at Lyemouth, a large town fourteen miles from Cocklemouth, and would be able to get through on the trunk line long before it would be possible on a civilian 'phone.

The result was that Jack got through to old Sam Lightfoot's receiver before twelve o'clock—for inquiry of the Herringhaven central supplied the information that the old boy had had the telephone installed more than a year—and, for the first time since their memorable parting, Lucy and Jack heard each other's voice, Mabel having left the matter to her husband.

While Jack was speaking over the wire, Roger Upton busied himself in looking up trains on the two lines, the Great Eastern and the Great Western. "Tell her," he said to Jack, "that she must catch the mail down from Paddington, and get out at Lyemouth. It is the only possible way of working it, and she will have to look sharp to do it. Sunday is always a beastly day for travelling, and now it's worse than ever."

"But—— " Jack began to protest.

"Tell her that. I'll explain afterwards man. Don't waste time by arguing."

"What did you mean by telling me to say she was to get out at Lyemouth?" asked Jack, when the party was motoring homeward to Cocklemouth.

"My dear chap, it would be impossible for her to catch a train stopping at Cocklemouth. I'll motor you over to meet the mail at Lyemouth. Mrs. Horrex will lend me the car."

"It is awfully good of you, Roger," cried Jack. "Really, I don't know what we should do without you!"

"No," crooned Mabel, who was sitting in front beside Upton. "I don't know how we can thank you, Major Upton."

Roger glanced at the little clock which was let into the front of the car close to the speedometer. "By

Jove!" he cried. "We must buck up. Any police traps about here?"

"I don't think so. Anyhow, the police would wink at anyone in this car," said Mabel, who had heard sundry interesting stories at dinner the night before.

"Then—You're not nervous, Beatie?" he asked the child.

"No, fank you," replied Beatie, who had been delighted by her first experience of a motor spin, and behaved herself so well that her father began to think he had misjudged her, and her mother wondered what had come over her.

Roger opened the throttle and let her out. The road was wide and straight, the Rolls Royce took no notice even of the Devon hills, and conversation was impossible till the car slowed down for its run through the town to Lambyre Road.

It was only when she was told that she would have to dine by herself that Beatie showed that she was herself.

Jack and Upton were indulging in a drink while Mabel removed the traces of the spin, and Beatie clung about the two men.

"I don't *want* to stay alone," she kept saying to her father.

"We shan't be very long, dear," he said, trying to soothe her.

"But I don't *want* to. I shall go up to Tommy," she said, merely to annoy her father.

"You'll do no such thing," said Jack, sternly. "You see," he said to Roger, "that infernal man has insinuated himself into the house in a most extraordinary way."

"Tommy's not an infernal man, and I shall tell him what you say," said Beatie.

"Oh!" cried Roger, pretending to be greatly shocked. "Tell tale tit, tongue must be slit! You wouldn't do that, Beatie! I'm sure! Not such a game little girl as you! Why, you didn't mind when we were going sixty an hour!"

This was certainly the way to treat her. She giggled and snuggled against the Major.

"I fink I like you," she said.

"I am highly flattered," said Roger. "And you will remember that courageous damsels like you are rather pleased to be left as mistress of the house, when their father and mother are called away on business."

"But it isn't business! Why can't I go to lunch wif you?"

"Because and because and because," said Roger, laughing. He had a small sister about Beatie's age, and knew how to handle her.

While Beatie was considering whether she should be cross or not her mother reappeared, and, entering the car, drove off with the two men.

CHAPTER IX

A SHADOW BEFORE

"I REALLY think mother might have sent a fowl or something," said Mabel to Lucy, for about the twentieth time, at breakfast on the following morning. On the previous evening, Lucy had been too tired on her arrival to do anything more than eat a biscuit and drink a glass of port, which Jack forced upon her before retiring to bed.

Beatie had carried out her intention of going up to Tompkins, and that worthy had been put in possession of as much of the facts relating to the Teagues and to Lucy as the child knew. As a result he was on the watch. If he could manage to be with the Greenfields when the Teagues arrived, he fancied he would succeed in forging a weapon wherewith he might make a better fight against Jack's refusal to accept him as a friend. His psychology was something like that of the Huns.

"But," said Lucy, "how could she? We did not know you wished me to come till yesterday morning, and she couldn't buy a fowl on Sunday. Besides, there was no time. It was all I could do to catch the train, after you had telephoned me to come yesterday. I did not mean to start till Monday, till Jack called me up."

"Well, I think she might have managed to send something somehow. Oh, Lucy! Have you seen that horrible man's letter?"

"My dear Mabs, you forget that I only came after midnight, and am only just down this morning."

So Mabel told her sister all about the Teagues' letter, showed her the card and the photograph, and was furious when, instead of condoling with her, her sister burst out into a rippling laugh.

"That's right, Lucy," said Jack, to whose eyes the girl gave relief and gladness. "I tell Mabel it's the best thing we can do, to take it laughing."

"But what on earth shall we do with the Teague people? I'm sure I don't know," said Mabel. "At all events, thank goodness, I am lunching out to-day, and you and Jack will have the pleasure of entertaining them if they come."

"Are you really leaving us to do that?" asked Lucy.

"Yes. And I wanted Jack to come too, but he wouldn't. He said it wouldn't be fair to you to leave you and Beatie alone to meet them."

"Thank you for that, Jack," said Lucy, with a laugh. "Well, we must do the best we can. But I assure you that it was not through me they got your address. No doubt, Sara heard it from the Riverses. They write to her, I know. I fancy old Mr. Rivers used to do business with Sara's father."

"Thank him for nothing then," said Mabel, a little vulgarly. "I hope they won't want to stay."

"My dear girl," said Jack, "you know very well they will expect to stay the night at least. And you had better tell Gladys to get their room ready for them."

"Look here," cried Jack, starting to his feet. "I'm hanged if I'm going to have that blighter here this morning. Mabel, you must send Gladys out to him and say we are engaged or not at home, or something."

From the dining-room windows the steps leading down from the road were visible, and Jack had seen Tompkins coming down, with something green under his right arm.

"Oh, daddy!" cried Beatie. "It is only Tommy.

I told him yesterday Auntie Lucy was coming, and I 'specks he wants to see her."

"You went to him after I had forbidden it?" asked her father very grimly.

"I didn't pwomise not to," argued the child.

"You will go to your room and stay there till I call you," said Jack, very angry.

"Shan't," said Beatie, defiantly, looking at her mother.

"Mabel, I wish you would tell her to go."

"Really, Jack, I think you are making a lot out of very little. Naturally, she saw no harm in going up to see Mr. Tompkins. It was very kind of him to bring the telegram up."

"Can't you see he only did it to find out what was in it?"

"Oh, I'm sure——"

But Jack's temper was up. "Are you going to your room Beatie?" he asked.

"Shan't," said Beatie.

Lucy looked a little appealingly at Jack, but she knew he was right, and said nothing. Mabel flushed a little.

Jack rose and rang the bell. "You will find Mr. Tompkins in the boudoir he said to the maidservant. "Please tell him that we are engaged this morning."

Gladys looked at her mistress, but the latter did not dare to interfere. She had seen the look in her husband's eyes before, very rarely, but she knew that when he looked like that it was unwise to cross him.

"And now," said Jack to Beatie, "you will come up to your room."

Beatie, too, saw the look in her father's eyes, and ran to her mother.

"Do go, Beatie dear," said Lucy.

"Mabel, will you please take the child to her room," asked Jack. His wife looked at him, hesitated, and was about to refuse.

But then she remembered that it was owing to him that she had got the *entrée* to Cockleview. That if he chose to "make himself nasty," she might lose all the advantages she hoped to reap from her association with Adoline Horrex. She knew at heart that he was right, and that Beatie was becoming unbearable, ill-mannered and disobedient.

She put her arm round her child and said, "Come, Beatie."

It was a shock to the little girl. She had trusted that her mother would support her against this tyrant who had come to upset their peace and quiet. And now the mother failed her.

"Shan't," she said, beginning to whimper.

"You see for yourself," said Jack, "that a child cannot be allowed to speak to her mother and father like that."

Indeed, Mabel was very angry at Beatie's disobedience to her, actually her, command. With more roughness than Jack would have shown, she seized the child by the arm and dragged her yelling and writhing through the door.

"If you do not come quietly I shall ask Gladys to help me," said Mabel, guessing that a threat to inflict such ignominy as to be handled by the servant would have more influence on the little girl than either scolding or pleading.

So Beatie subsided, and allowed herself to be taken up to her room. When the key was turned and she was left to her own thoughts, she first kicked peevishly at the panels of the door, and then flung herself on her bed and howled till she was weary of howling. Then, as no one seemed to pay any attention to her, she became quiet, and began to consider.

No. It did not pay to be disobedient to her father. It was her first real lesson in obedience, and it was ultimately to prove beneficial.

In the meantime, Tompkins had heard with incredulous surprise that the Greenfields were " engaged."

" Is Miss Greenfield engaged too ? " he asked, meaning to refer to Lucy whose name he did not know.

" D'you mean Beatie ? " asked Gladys.

" No, no. Her aunt."

" I reely don't know," said the girl giggling. Was this mean lath of a man " a goin' in for the missis's sister now her husband's come home," wondered Gladys, who had deduced much from the little she had seen.

" I daresay they do not know it is me who has called. Tell them I have brought some cabbages."

" Master see you comin' down the steps," giggled the girl. " If I was you I should come again later. They are busy now and that's a fact."

A little soothed by this intelligence, Tompkins prepared to take his leave. " Well," he said. " Take the cabbages. I'll look in again this afternoon, if I can."

" I hope that will be a lesson both for Beatie and Tompkins," said Jack, when Mabel had returned, flushed, from upstairs.

" Now, what shall I do for food ? " lamented Mabel. " Oh, Lucy, couldn't you go out this morning and do some shopping ? "

" Lucy shall do no such thing," replied Jack. " Really, Mabel, it will be all right. Yes. What is it ? " he asked, as Gladys again appeared.

" Parcel post, sir," said the maid.

" Oh, that's what it was. I saw the man come down the steps. Well, what is it ? "

Gladys held out a large mat basket addressed to Captain Greenfield.

Jack opened it, and produced about eight pounds of sirloin of beef. Inside was the name of a butcher at Port Talbot, and a note to the effect that the joint had been sent by the order of Captain Brian Teague.

CHAPTER X

CAPTAIN AND MRS. CAPTAIN

"Really!" said Mabel, looking quite pleased, "this is very thoughtful of them."

Jack had flushed with anger. "Why surely, you can see that this is the most gross impertinence of all!" he said. "What the devil does the man mean by sending joints of meat to me? It must be returned to the butcher at once."

"I'm sure it shan't," said Mabel, plucking up courage."

"I'm afraid, Jack, you'll have to swallow the insult, said Lucy, smiling. "The meat would go bad if it had another journey in this weather, and it would be simply wicked to spoil good meat in these days."

"Of course it would," agreed Mabel.

Jack pondered for a minute. It was true that it would be wicked to spoil good meat. But how could he bring himself to accept it. A solution occurred to him. "The only way out," he said, "is to insist on paying the man when he comes."

The sisters exchanged glances. Lucy understood Jack's point of view, while Mabel, who had far less delicacy of feeling in spite of her airs, was ready to accept benefits from the Teagues and to snub them afterwards. But they were both content to let the matter stand over for the two men to thresh out between them.

"You can do as you please about that," said Mabel, remembering with some anticipation of amusement her husband's own opinion of the obstinacy indicated by Brian Teague's chin.

"I mean to," retorted Jack, very angry.

"Then that's settled," said Mabel, rising. "I suppose I had better see about getting ready. Mr. Perryman said he would bring a car down early so that we might have a game or two of tennis on the Cockleview Court, before lunch. I shall be glad to do so to get my hand in. I have not played for years, and I don't wish to make a silly of myself at the club this afternoon."

Lucy followed her sister from the room, while Jack made his way to the boudoir and lit a pipe.

He had not been smoking long when he heard the arrival of one of the Horrexes' cars. He strolled through the French windows, and, going round the little house, met Roger Upton and Lance Perryman coming down the steps. The latter was a slim fair man, of the middle height. He was built in good proportion, and carried himself well. His face was round, snub nosed, wide mouthed, with large ears, small blue eyes, a reddish toothbrush moustache, and close cropped carroty hair. His features were all very mobile. It was the face of a born comedian. When he saw Jack, he began to contort himself, thrusting out his hip joints with a jerk, and strutting along ostentatiously displaying the fact that he was double jointed everywhere. He made himself pigeon breasted, and tripped down the steps with a continual metamorphosis of both limbs and facial expression.

"Don't be such an Ass, Lance," said Upton, giving him a push which precipitated him down the last three steps. He pretended to tumble and arrived on a level with Jack on all fours. He was one of those men who cannot help showing off the absurdities of which they are capable both in and out of season, and very often he was not only a bore but an irritating bore. On the other hand, on the rare occasions when he chose to conduct himself with sobriety, he could be as charming as any man.

He was the younger son of a millionaire earl, and it is a point in his favour that he never presumed on his position. Another good point he possessed was a sincere reverence for women who deserved it, and a veneration for unaffected beauty. He was no fool, was well read, and could himself scribble with some ability.

Much of his eccentricity arose from his shyness, of which he was ashamed, and which he endeavoured to conceal by his preposterous antics.

Mabel, hearing the car, had hurried herself to good purpose, and Perryman was still on all fours, wriggling his hind quarters in contortions, only made possible by his being double jointed, when the front door opened close to him and Lucy appeared.

Perryman flushed like a coy girl, and sprang to his feet amidst a roar of laughter from the two men. The sight of Lucy overwhelmed the buffoon. Never had he felt such an ass, for never had he seen a girl whose beauty and charm appealed to him as did Lucy's.

"Don't leave off, old man," said Upton. "Do it again. I'm sure Miss Lightfoot did not see you properly."

Perryman stood shifting his eyes from one point to another, and cursing his buffoonery. The girl saw his uneasiness, and checked the laugh which his absurd appearance had induced.

But Mabel, who had followed immediately on her heels, clapped her hands. "Oh!" she cried. "How *do* you manage to wriggle like that, Captain Perryman? You can't have any bones at all! Isn't it *clever*, Luce?"

"Very kind of you, Mrs. Greenfield," stammered Lance. "'Fraid 'clever' is hardly the word though.

I—I feel a beastly fool, Miss er—er—won't you introduce me, Greenfield ? "

Lucy accepted his apologies very kindly. He seemed such a boy. But she noticed the ribbon that he wore, and knew that only a man could have won it. He was in the flying corps, and his extraordinary command of his limbs enabled him to do stunts which were impracticable for those less gifted in that way.

He was an old friend of the Horrexes, and amused the old coal magnate more than most of Adoline's guests, so that he was doubly welcome at Cockleview.

He was not a lady killer like Colonel Percy Burnside, an especial favourite of Adoline's for some time past, but whose nose had recently been put out of joint by a second-lieutenant almost too beautiful to be a man. It may have been pique which caused the gallant colonel to succumb so readily to Mabel's charm. At any rate, he had delighted her by his attentions, and had wished to take the car down for her that morning. But Adoline said; " You'll have her for the greater part of the day, my dear boy, and you ought to know that one should never overdo a thing." So Burnside took the advice of the *experimentée*, and allowed Roger and Lance Perryman to fetch the woman with whom he hoped to enjoy a pleasant little amourette.

Lance's face fell when he learnt that Lucy was not to go either to Cockleview to lunch or to the tennis club. He hung round her when the group withdrew into the dining-room for refreshment, and endeavoured to erase from her mind the unfavourable opinion which he feared she had formed at first sight of him. When one thinks of it, a young man who is suddenly smitten by a girl's charm would naturally feel sore if he first attracted her attention by buffoonery. Although, to play the fool is often an excellent introduction to a maiden's good graces.

" Why don't you come and play tennis, Miss Lightfoot ? " he asked. " It isn't half a bad ground, and we don't let the local bounders bound in our setts."

" Well, you see, I have not seen the town yet," explained Lucy. " Jack is going to take me down this morning, and this afternoon I have a lot of things to do. It is my first day here."

" There's nothing to see in the town except the living gargoyles," said Perryman. " And they want explaining. They ought to go about with labels round their necks. Greenfield can't act as showman 'cause he's but a stranger here, heaven is his home."

" You are rather complimentary to this house, are you not ? " laughed Lucy.

" I did not mean the house," said Perryman. " I daresay the best part of Heaven consists of the angels, don't you know ? "

He looked as though she were quite satisfactory as an angel to him. And Lucy, who was quite unused to such rapid advances, treated his words as a new form of eccentricity.

" That's worse than going on all fours," she declared.

" Oh come. Won't you ever forget that ? " he pleaded. " Do please ! Look here, Miss Lightfoot. Show me you have forgotten that idiotic exhibition and I'll forgive myself."

" How very kind of you," cried the girl, still laughing. " But why should I wish you to forgive yourself ? "

" Oh, I say ! Now you must make amends for that. Will you ? "

Lucy thought, perhaps, she had been a little too hard on him. Moreover, she seemed to be speaking to him with extraordinary freedom considering that she had only known him a few minutes. She did not wish him to think her rude.

" How can I ? " she asked.

" Let me be your cicerone," he asked.

"To-day ? I thought you were to play tennis."

"Oh, I'll chuck that if you will let me."

"No. I can't do that really. Not to-day."

"Well, will you be on the front to-morrow morning ? I'll show you some of the gargoyles. I'll show you a beautiful poem which their fascination inspired. There ! Will not that tempt you ?"

"If I can manage it, I will be on the esplanade to-morrow morning," said Lucy. "I daresay Jack or Mabel will go down there."

"If they won't, it is quite easy to find the way !"

"Now Captain Perryman, do you think I could make an appointment to meet you on the day I have first made your acquaintance ! I don't know if you think——."

"My dear lady," cried Perryman, appalled. "I don't. Please forgive my infernal cheek. I—I won't say any more. I throw myself on the mercy of the court, and incidentally I may mention that I shall be on the front to-morrow morning with my M.S. in my pocket and my heart in my mouth. There !"

Roger Upton thought that Perryman had occupied quite enough of Lucy's time. He made his way to them. "Trying to show Miss Lightfoot some of your tricks, Lamprey," he asked. "You know we call this chap Lamprey, because he's got no bones, Miss Lightfoot."

"Oh, you shut up," said Perryman. "You run away and see the engine's oiled or something."

"Thank you. I'm going to lunch here," replied Upton.

"The deuce you are !" cried Perryman, disconsolately. So Upton, too, had his eye on this charming girl ! He wouldn't have said that nasty thing about Lampreys had he not. And he was going to lunch with her, hang him !

"Isn't it time we were going, Captain Perryman ?" asked Mabel, who thought that Lucy was receiving more attention than was good for her. Although she had made up her mind that if Upton disclosed an inclination towards Lucy she would encourage him——for it would give her another lift on the social ladder, to be sister to the wife of a man in Upton's position, who would certainly take precedence of Jack in "society," and she would gain a kind of vicarious splendour from the marriage—-she saw no reason why all the men who came down from Cockleview to see and fetch her should promptly fall at Lucy's feet.

That Lance should ever entertain serious intentions as regards Lucy she thought was impossible.

"Oh, there's no hurry," replied Lance. "The car does it in under ten minutes."

"But I promised Colonel Burnside to be there before twelve."

"Burnside can wait. It'll do him good."

Mabel tapped her foot upon the floor, and threw a glance at Perryman which he could not misunderstand.

"Of course if you wish—— " he began.

"Yes. I think we ought to start."

"Good-bye then for the present, Miss Lightfoot," said Perryman. "À *demain*, as the merry Gaul hath it."

"He took her hand and held it a moment, checked with an effort, a whimsical contortion of his features with which he often took his leave, and followed Mabel out of the house.

The latter drew back to let him pass, and took her husband aside for a moment. "Whatever you do, Jack," she said, "keep those people away from the tennis club."

"My dear girl," said Jack. "I shan't say where you've gone. I suppose you'll be back some time to-night."

"I shall dine there. I promised,. And oh, Jack. You'd better tell Gladys to cook that beef for lunch."

"I suppose I had. I remember that our friend Teague 'eats hearty,' though he is not 'delicate in his feeding.'"

"Oh, don't, Jack. Do try to get rid of them before I come home."

"You are absurd. It is impossible, and you know it. Either I must kick them both out then and there, and if I do the man is capable of making a scene in the street, or they must stay the night."

"Very well. Then, if Mrs. Horrex asks me to sleep at Cockleview, I shall do so." She shrugged her shoulders, and mounted the steps followed by her husband.

Roger Upton, Lucy and Jack stood against the gate and watched the car swerve round the corner, while Tompkins looked down from his garden above with rage, hate, and all uncharitableness burning in his heart.

As Lucy turned her head from looking after the car she caught sight of Tompkins, posed for inspection at the lower end of his garden. He assumed his demoniac grin, and took off his hat with a fantastic flourish. "I'm now comin' down," he shouted.

Jack looked at him, turned on his heel and went down the steps without acknowledging the man's salute or words. "If that doesn't settle him nothing will," he said to Lucy, who was just behind him.

Roger Upton heard him, and laughed. "Bet you it does not," he said. "Nothing will get through his hide short of physical force. Hullo!" he added, looking to the right in the direction whither the car had whirled. "Here's a chariot coming this way. Must be for you, as yours is the last house and this is a *cul de sac.*"

Jack ran down the remainder of the steps, with Lucy leaping behind him and Upton bringing up the rear. All three halted, and burst out laughing when they reached the door.

"Ten to one it is the noble Capting," said Upton. "Oh, my aunt, Jack, what a time we shall have!"

They had hardly got inside the house when a cab stopped at the gate whence they had just come.

A short thick set man, wearing the uniform of a captain in the merchant service, emerged from the cab, and turned to assist a resplendent woman, whose appearance shocked the atmosphere.

"You pay the man, mammy," said the mariner.

"'Ow much is it?" asked the woman, in a cockney accent that cut like a knife.

"Oh, pay him what he asks," urged the husband, interrupting his wife's haggling. "Don't let 'em think we're mean."

He stooped and shouldered an enormous cabin trunk which he had lifted from the cab, and, following his wife down the steps, trotted with an ease which proved that if the trunk was as heavy as it looked he was a man of powerful physique.

"Is the Captain in?" he asked the fair Gladys, when she answered the door to his push of the bell. "Tell him Captain and Mrs. Captain Teague's here."

He dropped the trunk in the hall with a thump. "I'll carry that up for you when I've shook your master by the hand," he explained. "Where is he, my dear?"

Drawing herself up with magnificent primness Gladys led the way to the dining-room, where Jack, Lucy and Roger Upton were awaiting the guests.

Jack alone of the men was in mufti.

Teague halted for a moment on the mat in the doorway, and gave a swift but all embracing glance round the room, including its occupants, in a lingering look. Then he darted at Upton and clapped him on the back. "Jack, my boy," he cried, "give us your fist! Not him! Then it's you!" He turned to Jack and repeated the back-slapping with his left hand while he seized the unhappy man's right hand in his. "Lord!" said he, "I'm glad to shake you by the hand! And my pretty sister Mabel! Lord! You look younger than what I thought! Give us a kiss."

Lucy drew back. "I am not Mabel," she said.

"Then you must be Lucy," said the woman, "of course it's Lucy, Brine. Lor! Where's Mibel then?"

Captain Teague was very like his photograph, but considerably older looking. He was nearly bald when he removed his gold ornamented cap. But Sara was worse than was anticipated. Her dress was too young for her, and its short skirt showed her enormous feet. When she walked the feet shot out at an angle of forty-five degrees, so that if each foot had proceeded in the way it started, and there had not been a rearrangement after every step, she would have performed a *grand écart* in less than three strides. Her face was red and bloated, her nose swollen, and shiny even beneath the powder which failed to hide its purple veins. Her eyes were prominent, hard and yellow in the whites. The gold chain round her neck and the watch pinned to her bodice were both there, and on her wrists sparkled bracelets set with brilliants. Her fat hands seemed to be bursting through their yellow gloves. Her skirt and bodice were made of good material, and were well made of a simple navy blue colour. But they were cut ahead of fashion, and the style fit for a girl of seventeen, who cared more for an alluring style than for reputation. The woman's voice was hoarse and shrill, and, as already mentioned, she spoke with an appalling cockney accent. Mabel had been right in thinking that the woman would be worse than the man.

When Brian Teague had got the party sorted out, and had his hand shake, he quieted down considerably.

"Did ye get the meat?" he asked. "I told the butcher at Port Talbot to send you a joint of beef, 'cos I thought it might be short here."

It was no time to go into explanations. They could come later. Jack contented himself by answering in the affirmative.

"Perhaps Mrs. Teague would like to go upstairs," said Lucy.

"I'll ring for Gladys," said Jack. "She will show her up."

"We've got a servant too," said Brian Teague. "Lor! I don't let mammy want for nothin'. Ah! We've got a servant too."

He said it with an air of explaining that he was not to be frightened by any servant, and that Jack need not think to come the high horse over him with Gladys.

Teague's eyes kept roaming from Lucy to Sara and Sara to Lucy with a look of puzzlement in them. "Well," he said at last, as Gladys knocked at the door prior to entry. "This here beat me! Ain't you two sisters? Don't sisters in sassiety kiss each other! I ain't used to people like this!"

Jack was about to reply a little sharply, because he feared lest Lucy should be vexed. But she herself eluded the difficulty. "We are only half-sisters, Captain Teague," she said. "And I do not think I ever met your wife before."

Teague looked at his wife, and shook his head. "That do me," he said. "But you don't want to think we wish to push ourselves where we ain't wanted."

"Oh, come, Brine," said Sara. "It's not that! Don't be a silly. I'm shore Capting Greenfield is most kind, and naterally Lucy don't feel like kissin' a gal she never saw before. Come you upstairs and wash yourself. Then you can 'ave a talk."

"You hold on," said the Captain, putting his hand into a mat bag he carried, and producing two bottles, one after the other. Without saying more he took a corkscrew from his pocket and drew the cork of each bottle. "Now," he said, "all we want is glasses and water. It's whiskey and rum from the ship. I know how hard it is to get it ashore. But lor! We have plenty from the ship. We don't want for nothing I can tell you, and you're welcome, Captain! And now I think of it, here's a bit of the right sort of backy."

From the deep pocket of his coat he drew half a dozen cakes of dark tobacco, the smell of which declared it to be of very fine quality. "You'll find there's something to taste there, Captain." he said to Jack, who took the cakes in a bewildered way.

How could he refuse them? How could he hurt this man's feelings, who was obviously so thoroughly good hearted? The woman would be a fearful trial. But the man, if only he would get out of the habit of raining down gifts, might prove interesting, and quite a worthy fellow.

He turned to the sideboard and put glasses and water before the sailor. "Would you rather have soda?" he asked.

"Not me. Spoils the taste. But we have soda at home for them as likes it. And we have pictures on the wall too, some of 'em bigger than what you've got. And the furniture is as good if not better. It looks newer, though I see this ain't old rubbage. Say when, Major," he said, addressing Upton, who was trying to conceal his delighted laughter.

With a glance at Jack, Roger said. "Thank you. That'll do."

"Lord man, you won't taste it," cried the sailor.

"Oh? I'm a bit off spirits just now," explained Upton. "Greenfield here will make up for it."

"Confound you, Roger," muttered Jack, under his breath, while Lucy laughed.

"Shall I go up with you?" she asked the woman.

"Not till I've 'ad my whack," replied Sara, firmly.

"You help yourself," suggested her husband. "Lord!" he said, admiringly. "She can lap it up, like cream!"

Sara proved as good as his word, and swallowed two stiff whiskeys without turning a hair. "Now I'm ready," she said to Lucy. "Don't you finish both them bottles," she called out as she left the room.

CHAPTER XI

TOMPKINS DISMISSED

When his wife had left the room, Brian Teague seated himself, and looked about him. Jack had noticed that there was no brogue to be observed in his speech. Evidently, if he was Irish he was an Ulsterman. Indeed, there was a certain Scotch precision in his way of speaking, a brisk if deliberate crispness of utterance which is characteristic of some of the Belfast descendants of Scottish settlers.

It is curious that the greatest Ulster representative of modern times should possess a delightful and most winning brogue. The soft persuasive charm of this may or may not be natural. It certainly belongs rather to the West of Ireland than to the stern sons of the North-East. And Brian Teague had no share in it. There was, too, an alert watchfulness about him, as though he were ready at any moment to contradict any statement made, which was far from being Hibernian. On the whole, the man's speech was better than might have been anticipated from his letter. He could talk better than he could write.

"My rooms are bigger than this," he said challengingly to Jack. "This is a pokier place than I expected to find. Lord! Sapphire made out you had a regular palace! But I don't think much of this. I daresay now," he added sympathetically, "they don't pay you a lot for your job in the army, do they ? And you can't get pickin's same as me. I'll send you enough stores to last a twelvemonth. You may jest as well have 'em."

He seemed to realise that he was holding the floor rather egotistically, and he took a pull at his glass of spirits and water, casting estimating glances around him.

"When do you sail ?" asked Roger Upton, who saw that Jack was struggling to treat the self-invited guest with courtesy.

"I shall have to be aboard, come Wensday. But we may not sail for some days. Admiralty job. Mus'n't say no more, not even to a brother orfser." He drew himself up: "What's your measurement round your chest ?" he asked Jack. "I reckon you're four or five inches taller than me, but I fancy I hold you in chest measurement."

"I've no doubt of it," replied Jack, wearily.

"But don't you want to know ?" asked Teague, surprised by Jack's *insouciance.*

"Not a bit," replied Jack, grinning. "My good chap, what the deuce does it matter to me ?"

"I ain't used to people like you," said Teague, frowning. "Don't Mabel want to know whether her husband's as big round the chest as Sapphire's ?"

"I should not say that it would interest her in the least," said Jack.

"Well, I can't make you lot out. But see here. I didn't say nothin' 'bout mammy comin' down here in my letter—you got my letter all right, didn't you, brother ?"

"Yes.—I wish to God he would chuck the brother business," Jack muttered to Upton. But the latter seemed rather to enjoy the situation. His eyes were dancing with amusement, and he only grinned at Jack's plaint.

"Well, as I was sayin', I didn't mean mammy to come at first. But then I thought it over. Ye see she don't get on with the folk in our parts. She says they ain't like what she's accustomed to down Whitechapel way. I've took a beautiful flat, seventy-five pounds a year, and lor! the rooms twice as big as these. And I've fitted it up fit for a queen. And I've dressed her, well, you can see for yourself, better than ever I dressed my first. Not as I complain. She pay for it. She look a treat, don't she now? Well, as I was sayin', I've dressed her and set her up fit for a duchess. Well, she had her cards printed, with the captain on so as there shouldn't be no mistake, and she went and called on a score of ladies round about. She wasn't asked in nowhere, but she left the cards. Well, would you believe it, not one of 'em has paid no attention. They hain't returned the compliment. Not one. And a woman as lives with her daughter in the flat just over ours looked her full in the face and never spoke or nodded, looked right through her as if she wasn't there. I tell ye, I said somethin' to that old high and mighty! And she said she was used to speakin' to gentlemen and ladies and not such as us! Now that happened after I'd wrote and posted the letter. Then I thought that Mabel would be the one to interdoose her to the right lot. She has told me a lot about Mabel and you, brother, and owned as your friends was probably higher up than what she knew in Whitechapel. So I said, come on down then, and brother Jack and sister Mabel will put you in the way of it. I ain't going to have my wife looked down on by nobody, and——"

"But how did you know I was in England?" asked Jack, at last showing some signs of interest.

"I didn't. That's where the luck come in. I says to mammy, well if he's still in foreign parts—for she told me as you'd been sent to Gibraltar,—Mabel will open the letter. And it's Mabel as you want more than him."

"How did you get our address?" asked Jack.

"Oh," said the simple mariner, "of course mammy had that. She gave it me soon after I married her. Before, I think. I know she told me all about you before the clove hitch. Of course she knew her own sister's address. Naturally she's been hearin' from her."

"Ah," said Jack. It was then as he thought. Sara had made a feature of her relationship with Mabel, and had used it to bolster up her social position in the eyes of the innocent captain. Teague was evidently quite ignorant of the fact that the Lightfoots had nothing to do with his wife. He wrote the letter and came down confident that the news of the marriage would be of interest, and that he and his wife would be welcome guests. As for the man himself, it would be impossible to make him understand the gulf which existed between him and Jack and Jack's friends. Sara knew well enough the difference between them. But Teague was quite innocent of effrontery. That was what made the position so difficult. For Jack was too much a gentleman to be willing to hurt Teague's feelings intentionally. Some scheme must be invented whereby the stay of the Teagues should be abbreviated as much as possible, and every effort should be made to keep them from parading their presence in the town.

"Perhaps," said Teague, "the Major has his missis here who'd help. Ye see, what I want is that mammy should take her place with the best of 'em as she ought."

"I'm afraid I can't help you," said Upton. "I'm unmarried."

"That's a pity," replied the merchant skipper. "However, you may know some of the top set down here, and if you can, I'm sure you will interdoose 'em to my wife."

"Good lord!" thought Jack, "I believe he means to leave his wife here when he sails! I must put a stopper on that."

"I s'pose," said Teague, "as you've plenty of room for mammy. I'm willin' to pay for her board and lodgin', and I'll leave orders with the butcher at Port Talbot to send you a joint of meat every week. That'll be a help. Then when I get back, I'll bring a lot of ships stores. How'll that do ? "

" I'm sorry," lied Jack. " You see we have Lucy here now. This is only a little house, and there is only one spare room."

" Well, mammy could sleep with Lucy after I'm gone," suggested the skipper.

" I assure you that it is quite impossible," said Jack, firmly. " Lucy is staying here some time. Besides, you cannot leave your flat empty. You say you have a servant there. It would not be safe to leave her there alone."

" Oh, yes, we have a servant and everything proper. But I'd get rid of her and shut up the place till I get back. By that time mammy would have got to know—— "

" It won't do. Two married women in one house would never agree. I'm sure of that. I know that Mabel would not consent."

" Why, who's she ? She's no better than mammy. And where is she ? I don't understand you folk. I ain't used to your sort."

The skipper's chin projected savagely, and his blue eyes glittered dangerously.

" We won't discuss that," said Jack, rising. " Now I don't know what you wish to do this morning. I was going to take Lucy down the town with Beatie."

" Beatie ? Who's she ? "

" My little daughter." Jack remembered that the child had been sent to her room. It was just as well that she had not been present at the coming of the Teagues, but she could not be kept aloof from them throughout their stay. Hang it all, how awkward it was !

"Lor', bless her little heart, where is she? Ah! I shall be pleased when mammy want a pram. That I shall. I never had no luck with my first, but unless I'm mistook—why here she is!"

Lucy, on having led Sara to the room appropriated to her and her husband, and left her there, had thought it best to go to Beatie and explain that the Teagues had arrived. "You may run down now if you like, dear," said Lucy.

"I shan't run down 'cos you tell me," replied the child. "I won't be ordered about by you, auntie."

"Oh well, stay here if you prefer it," replied the aunt, taking the best way with the ill-tempered little girl.

Finding that she was left to do as she liked, Beatie made her way downstairs. As ill luck would have it, Tompkins had made up his mind that he had waited long enough to put in his appearance again. He was far from being defeated by the snubs he had endured that morning. He had seen the arrival of the Teagues, and guessed that the Greenfields had no desire to exhibit them.

He had postponed the visit of which he had given warning in his shout from his garden as Mabel drove off till he thought Jack would have had time to forget that shout, and to have settled down with the visitors. Now if he could get inside the house without having to demand admission, he might be able to find out something about these people, whose telegram he had carried up to Cockleview.

Any little thing which might give him a hold on the Greenfields was fish for Tompkins's net.

On the entrance of the Teagues, the front door had been left open. Jack, and all the party in the dining-room, were too much occupied with themselves to be watching the steps, so that Tompkins managed to descend to the threshold without being seen.

Thus it was that Beatrice, tripping slowly along the hall to the dining-room, saw his lean figure standing in the porch. She knew that her father did not wish to have the man inside the house. It would be her revenge to thwart him. So she ran to the door and said. "Come in, Tommy. Mummy's out, but daddy's in the dining room."

Tompkins hesitated a little. He did not fully appreciate the grossness of his impudence, but he had a vague notion that Jack would resent his coming. How far would he carry his resentment? Surely, he would not be violent! Tompkins had a great respect for his skin. But he did not think that Jack would actually assault him. And mere verbal insult was nothing to this man.

"I'll follow you, dear," he said.

Hardly had the skipper called out "here she is," when Tompkins loomed up behind her slim shape, his features twisted into their gargoyle grin.

"I told you so," chuckled Upton to Jack.

"Confound it!" muttered the latter. "This is the limit!"

He went quickly to Tompkins while Beatie hung back from the skipper's proffered embrace. "I am engaged now, Mr. Tompkins," he said. "I cannot ask you to remain."

"I only wanted——" Tompkins began.

"I don't care a damn what you wanted. I can't see you now."

"But can't I stay to——"

"No. You cannot. To tell you the truth I shall be glad if you will consider our acquaintance at an end," said Jack, carried beyond the limit he had set himself by his anger at the man's persistence.

Tompkins still hesitated. He let his eyes roam round the room. He saw Upton trying to hide a laugh. He saw the skipper gazing at him, watchful and puzzled.

He saw Beatie regarding her father with a mischievous smile on her lips.

"You don't mean that I'm sure," he said. "But I'll go now as you ask me to. I won't bear any ill-feeling."

He turned on his heel, and left the room and the house. He was inwardly fuming. Greenfield should pay for this. Wait till he had gone, that was all! Just wait! His leave could not be long. He would have no scruple now in making open love to Mabel.

He went home and bullied his wife till she went down the town shopping to be rid of him. Then he set to work in his garden, digging furiously, to work off his gall.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE TOWN

THE scene had gone with such a snap that it was over and Tompkins out of the house, before Beatie realised that her father had actually turned "Tommy" out of the house. She was beginning to understand that her father was not a man with whom it was advisable to take liberties. She had cried herself to sulky silence in her room. But she had come to realise that there was something to be admired in a man who meant to be obeyed. She was beginning to fear him, and to be fonder of him because of her fear. Moreover, Tompkins had looked extremely foolish. He had certainly made a poor display. On the whole, Beatie thought that her father was worth cultivation. At all events, she would not evince any displeasure at his course of action.

Brian Teague had witnessed the discomfiture of Tompkins with wide open eyes. He was not impressed by the look of Tompkins, and he appreciated a man. Tompkins looked like a "slab sided, longshore lubber, a sneaky sort of land shark," he told his wife afterwards. And he admired the way Jack handled him. He felt that he could not have done it so well. He would have used force. He would probably have smashed in the man's face, and thrown him out of the house. But he could not have got rid of him as Jack had. The simple mariner began to see that he had much to learn ashore. His first wife had been of the proletariat, and had never pretended to be anything else. The difference between her and Sara was that while the latter was no better in any respect than the first wife, indeed, was far less valuable, inasmuch as she could not sew, wash or bake, she pretended to belong to the better class.

She had posed to Brian as a "superior person," had boasted in her atrocious cockney accent, of her relations, of their social standing, and of their position in the world. She had pretended that she was quite one with them. And simple Brian had accepted her at her own valuation. He had never come into personal contact with any other than the class to which his first wife and himself belonged, the proletariat. He had, as Jack had guessed, always sailed aboard a cargo tramp. He had never associated either ashore or at sea with even the middle class. Ashore he had seen his owners, but seen them purely in the matter of business. Socially, he was as ignorant and untutored as the roughest hand before the mast. He accepted Sara as a specimen of the upper classes, and was ready to study the ways of those classes. It was not that he considered himself inferior to anyone. But he had seen the snubs inflicted on his wife in the West End quarter, which she had chosen for their domicile, and he realised that there was something which he did not understand. And Sara desired to make one of this class, to have friends among its members. Why she had not already succeeded in this, he did not ask her or himself. He accepted everything she said as gospel. And Sara, having committed herself by various boasts of her intimacy with the Greenfields, and buoyed up by the knowledge that she was a captain's wife, believed that she might force her way into those circles which hitherto had rejected her. She herself had spent all her life in the East End of London, and was as ignorant of the ways of ordinary society as was Teague himself. But she did not believe it. Just as Mabel had built great hopes of social elevation through her marriage with Jack, hopes which were magnified when he became an officer in the army, a real captain, so had Sara believed that she was entitled to claim admission into the ranks of the class to which Greenfield belonged through her marriage with a merchant skipper. That there was anything about a gentleman which did not depend upon money or nominal rank, Sara could not understand. She knew that her husband sometimes earned forty pounds a month as a skipper, and he was a captain. And if that did not make him as good a gentleman as Jack Greenfield, who certainly earned less than that, she would have liked to know why. Her set back in town had infuriated her. She had believed that her cards, with "Mrs. Captain Brian Teague" and a really very decent address written upon them, would procure her as many friends as she liked of a society at least equal to that in which the Greenfields could move.

Indeed, she had been as mistaken in her hopes as Mabel had been in hers, until Jack's chance meeting with Roger Upton enabled Mabel to make the acquaintance of the Horrex set. In a word, both Mabel and Sara were jackdaws, who were trying to pass themselves off as peacocks.

Had Sara known the success which had recently attended her half-sister's endeavours, had she been aware that at the moment of her arrival at Lambyre Road Mabel was conversing freely with Lance Perryman, the scion of a noble house, it would have taken Jack all his time and more than his diplomatic skill to prevent her from making her way up to Cockleview or to the tennis ground.

As it was, the situation bristled with difficulties which were quite sufficient to worry Jack. And he thanked his stars that he had had the foresight to take the Major into his confidence.

Much as Upton sympathised with his friend, he had too keen a sense of humour not to enjoy the position. He had not been smitten by Mabel, and he saw through

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her ambitions. Lucy was of a different nature altogether. And he believed that she would be able to share his amusement in watching the struggles of the Greenfields with the Teagues. At any rate, he would do his utmost to spare her annoyance of any kind. For already he felt that Lucy meant a good deal to him.

"Come and kiss your Uncle Brian," said the skipper to Beatie. But Beatie held back. She examined the skipper from head to toe. He had kind eyes, and he seemed to her to be an old, old man. On the whole, she approved of him. She was taken with his gold lace. But she felt that he did not fit in with the relationship of unclehood. A child's eyes are often very keen to observe a lack of breeding. And though Beatie herself was ill-mannered, and had seen no great example of breeding in her mother, yet she had unconsciously gathered a good deal of critical acumen from her father. Jack was a gentleman, and the child sensed his difference from the skipper.

She held out her hand, but eluded his extended arms. "You cannot be my uncle," she said. "Daddy and mummy bofe say you are not veir bruvver."

The skipper scowled at Jack. "D'ye mean you disown my wife ?" he asked.

"By no means," said Jack. "But you must know that I never heard of her till I got your letter."

The skipper was silenced for the time. He must ask Sara, or, as he believed her name to be, Sapphire, about that. She had led him to believe that she was quite intimate with the Greenfields. He remembered that this was before he had suggested going down to see them, or even writing to them. She had seemed a little uneasy when he told her he meant to write to them, and still more so when he asked her to get ready to accompany him to Cocklemouth. But the man was thoroughly loyal to the woman who had deceived him. He was, in some utterly inexplicable way, fascinated by her coarse charms, if charms they can be called. And he was hot tempered, ready to take offence at any slight put upon her. If she had not begged him to be patient, he would have made a scene before now. But Sara, finding that there was no way out of going to Cocklemouth other than telling her husband that she had lied to him, had determined to make the most of the chance, and to do her utmost to reap some benefit from the visit. She was incapable of understanding the impossibility of her ever being accepted as an acquaintance by people of decent education and position. So she had begged Brian to submit to anything for a time until she saw how the land lay.

"I ain't used to people like you," said the skipper for the fifth or sixth time. "You don't seem to hold with family love and that. Howsoever, you've made us welcome, and there's my hand."

He proceeded solemnly to "shake brother Jack by the hand" again, and Jack suffered it.

"Well," he said, as Sara's and Lucy's footsteps were heard descending from above. "What about this walk down the town. I'd like a smell of the sea now I'm here."

"Would you not rather wait till after lunch?" asked Jack.

"No. I'm ready when mammy is."

"Look 'ere, dad," cried Sara's harsh voice at the door, "when're you goink to tike hup the trunk? I can't get aht my best 'at till you 'ave, and I'm shore I ain't goink dahn the tahn in this to disgrice my sister Mibel though she ain't 'ere."

The skipper's face fell. "I'm sorry, my darlin'," he said. "I'll do it now. 'Twon't take a minute."

"We'll both of us be ready in five minutes," he called out to Jack as he followed his wife upstairs.

Lucy entered, her face radiant with mirth.

"Well, Jack," she said, when she had closed the door behind her, "what do you think of them. The captain is not so bad. But, my dear boy! What a woman!"

"Yes. What are we to do, Luce?" asked Jack. "He wants to go down on the front."

"Well, you'd better take them. I can do my shopping if you will tell me the name of the shops. And oh! Jack! I think we shall have to cook that beef for lunch. There is not enough in the house without it. Mabel seems to have got hardly anything."

"Very well. Tell Gladys to have it ready by—what's the time now? Let us make it as late as we can, and then, perhaps, we may be able to keep them indoors this afternoon."

"It is just past twelve,"

"Say lunch at two-thirty then."

"Oh, daddy, and I'm so hungry now," said Beatie.

Jack, having punished the child, wisely made no further reference to her misconduct. "Well, I daresay Aunt Lucy can find you up something. And Beatie, you can show your aunt where to do the shopping."

This did not suit Roger, who wished to keep with Lucy. "We'd better all keep together," he said.

"But we shall be such a crowd!" objected Jack.

"We may meet old Cutwater. You remember him at dinner the other night. He is always in the town in the morning carting about a huge basket. You'll be able to shift the skipper on to him."

Almost the first person they met in the High Street was old Clarence Cutwater, who posed as a retired captain, but had really been a purser in the merchant service. He had made a fortune in some mysterious manner, and his benefactions to the local charities and his magnificent disregard of veracity or probability in his *contes* had procured him the invitation to the dinner at which Jack and Mabel had met him.

He was a tall man, very stout, fat faced with good features, rather obscured by excess of tissue. He wore a grey moustache, and, except for his unmistakable sailor's eyes, had got rid of all outward semblance of a merchant mariner. He was a male jackdaw, and as amusing in his way as Sara Teague herself.

"Ah, Major," he said to Upton, "glad to see you. What d'ye think of this hat? It's a real Panama. I paid thirty pound for it."

"I paid forty for one for my beauty here," cried Brian, without waiting for an introduction, and forgetful that he had put the figure at four in his letter to Jack and Mabel. He recognised a rival, and was eager to get to close quarters.

"Ah!" said Cutwater. "My wife's got one at home as cost fifty."

With a word or two Roger made the two men known to each other, and Brian then proudly introduced his beloved Sapphire.

"She looks young beside me, don't she?" said Brian. "Lor'! At the shippin' orfice they'd hardly believe as she was my wife!"

"Oh, shut it!" said the coy Sara.

"We Captains know something, don't we, Captain?" said Cutwater. "But about that hat. I've got another up at my house as cost an unnerd. You should come up and see it. It's a good house. But nothing like the one I had at Plymouth. That *was* a house! I had to leave it because my wife couldn't get enough servants to do the work. Green-houses, stablin' and a paddock! Ah! And fifteen bedrooms, spare bedrooms, we had. We've kept most of the furniter, though we had to sell some o' the oldest stuff as the house here wouldn't hold it. What're you doing now? Can't you come up and have a look at it now?"

"Would you care to, Sapphire, my darling?" asked Brian.

"Yus," said Sara. "I want to see that 'at."

"Look here, Captain Cutwater," said Jack, who guessed that the man would like to be called captain though he had no claim to the title, "I wonder if you'd set Captain Teague on his way back here. I have to go to the post office."

"Certainly," replied the old purser, who never minded making promises. Moreover, he was not able entirely to forget that a purser is a captain's inferior. As a private retired gentleman he would have disdained to admit Teague's superiority. But old antic habit made him inclined to treat the real merchant skipper with deference.

So Jack and Beatie made for the post office, while Roger and Lucy awaited their return. Cutwater, walking on air in spite of his gouty feet, conducted the Teague's. Cutwater was about to "show off" his possessions. There was nothing he liked better. He swayed his enormous abdomen before him, swinging a basket loaded with groceries in his right hand. Over his eyebrows he drew the brim of his really valuable Panama. Sara felt that she was seeing life. She planked out her huge feet with determination, and bore her much feathered hat high. Her locket and chain, her watch and other trinkets glittered on her ample bosom. Her short skirted frock displayed limbs which seemed to flow down into her boots in an even line, as though they were being poured into a jelly bag, for there was no shape of ankle or calf to be seen. Profoundly content with her appearance she paced beside her shorter husband, and admired the gold braid on his uniform. She wondered that Cutwater should dress in mufti if he were entitled to adorn himself with galloons. The gold "smartened a man up so," she thought. Cutwater bowed to many people who were patently of "the bettermost class" of Cocklemouth, and his bows were politely returned. Here was an admission of the social rank of a merchant skipper! Now and then he stopped to exchange a word or two with someone. Most of these people were dowdies of a smug primness extraordinary, and of a strange and weird ugliness. But the former East End barmaid recognised their style instinctively, and knew them for what they were. So now she was in touch with the aristocracy, though she was sure that she would never dress in so frumpish a way as seemed to be correct at Cocklemouth.

She paraded the street proudly, and did not resent the absorption in themselves which the two old mariners exhibited.

After passing through the town Cutwater turned up a hilly street, and Sara began to pant with the climbing. She was about to complain that she was "blown," when Cutwater opened a pair of large iron gates, through which he led the way to a majestic yellow-washed house, standing in a neat garden surrounded by a well-timbered slope of pasture.

"This is somethin' like an 'ouse this is," said Sara. "Diffrunt to Jack and Mabel's."

"Ah! Do they live in a small house?" asked Cutwater, who never called on people living in small houses, and rarely recognised them in the street. He had been rather attracted by Jack and Mabel at Cockleview. But he could not follow the Horrex lead in every respect. They might be willing to be intimate with people living in small houses. In their position they could afford to know whom they liked. But Cutwater was as firm as Mrs. Speke, the vicar's wife, in resolutely declining all commerce with those who could not support their claim to be somebody by dwelling in a mansion.

"You should have seen my house at Plymouth," he said. "This is nothin' to it. There was an acre of glass there, and I had two motors and an electric plant! But it wanted at least ten servants, and when I could only get eight I gave it up. It is so hard to get servants now."

"So I find," said Sara. "I find it very 'ard."

Cutwater threw a doubtful glance at her.

He was not a man of refinement or culture. But he knew when an aspirate was misplaced. He remembered that there were merchant master mariners and merchant master mariners. There was the captain of a great Atlantic passenger crack and the skipper of a coasting coal tank. Had he been a little hasty in offering to show these people his house? After all, he knew nothing of the Greenfields, and he learnt now that they lived in a small house. He must be careful. He must show off his greatness as ostentatiously as he could.

In the circumstances, perhaps, it would be well to keep his wife out of the way, though she would be sure to want to know who the woman was whom he had brought in.

He saw his wife's wizen crinkled cheeks, and thin nose flattened against the glass, her little eyes squinnying through the window of the morning room as he approached his house with his two visitors.

"There!" he cried, as he flung open his hall door while at the same moment he rang the bell. "What d'ye think of that!"

It was a good hall, heaped with all sorts of early Victorian upholstery and specimens of the cabinetmakers craft.

"Take the spirit stand and glasses into the dining-room, Thomas," he said to an elderly butler, who answered his ring. "And a bottle of port for the lady."

"*I've* got a lot of furniture just like that," said Brian, by no means discouraged. "I paid twenty pound for a hat rack."

Cutwater looked at him. He had the appearance of prosperity. After all, it was he with whom he, Cutwater, had to do, not with the Greenfields who lived in a small house.

"My rooms are a little larger than these," said Teague, looking round him as he entered the immense dining-room. This was really a fine room, well furnished in its heavy bourgeois style, and three times the size of the largest room in the Teagues' flat. But why should Brian admit that? "I can't hardly breathe in the rooms of my brother Jack, the Greenfields' house," he said.

Cutwater thought more of him. He must be impressed somehow. The relationship with the Greenfields was obscure. But could doubtless be explained.

He led him to the table, a very large and very fine piece of old mahogany, which was not insulted by being covered by a cloth.

"There," he said, "that is one thing I will have my man do. I say that no woman could keep a table in such condition as that. It needs a man."

Brian Teague smiled. "I don't agree with you," he said. "My maid does mine just as well."

Cutwater glared. "But look at it, man," he said; "look at it. Put your face down close to it. Like this."

He showed the way by bending down and putting his nose within six inches of the surface of the table, as though he were smelling the polish rather than looking at its shine.

Brian followed the example set him. But he stuck to his point. "My maid gets quite as good a shine as that, and I think a richer colour. What do you say, mammy?"

"Not 'arf," said mammy.

"Ain't she a wonder?" said Brian, with intense admiration. "Look at her, Captain! Ain't I a lucky one to have caught an innocent young darlin' like her! I tell you, I'm never tired of asking people if I ain't lucky."

"Oh, shut it, Brine," said the innocent darling. And again Cutwater wondered. That Brian utterly failed to be impressed was in his favour, though it was a disappointment to the elder man. But Cutwater had sufficient education and knowledge of conduct to notice the atrocious solecisms of prosody and accent of which Sara was guilty. No doubt, he thought, like many a jolly sailor before him, Captain Teague had made an ass of himself over a woman. If he came to think of it, his own wife did not shine in comparison with himself! She was a skinny, insignificant snipe-nosed little vixen, and he had no great catch in her. It would not be just to judge Teague by his wife.

So again Cutwater flowed on in hospitable intent to astound his guest by the magnitude of his possessions.

The possession which chiefly interested both Brian and Sara was the whiskey. Declining their host's offer of port ("it cost me half-a-guinea a bottle ten years ago," Cutwater delicately explained), they found an old and mellow spirit of nearly proof strength, and they expressed their gratification and surprise. "I can't make it out seeing that you've left the sea, Captain," said Brian. "Of course, I can get some good stuff off ship. But how you do it here beats me."

"I daresay it does. All I can tell you," said Cutwater, "is that it costs me nearly a pound a bottle. Try one of these cigars, I pay half-a-crown each for 'em."

When justice had been done to the fine spirit by all parties, and Brian had approved the excellent Cabana he had lit, both guests and host were a little the mellower from the potations. Cutwater proceeded to go through the house. If there was an article of any importance of which he did not tell the price, it was an omission caused by forgetfulness, and quite unintentional. And almost every figure he named was covered by Brian as the cost of some article at the flat; so that the progress was like that of two bidders at an auction, of whom Brian was always the later and higher.

The famous fifty and a hundred guinea Panamas alone remained victorious. Brian knew that he had mentioned the price of his wife's as forty pounds, and he could not raise it. But he said that he knew where there was one worth two hundred guineas, and that he intended to get it the next time he sailed for South America. He was not going to be outdone by the other "captain." Not he.

The two mariners parted with mutual esteem, and as he took his leave, Brian said, "Well, Captain, you must look us up when next you are in London. If I'm at sea, mammy will look after you and your missis. Give us a card, my beauty."

Sara proudly handed over one of those remarkable pieces of pasteboard, and, assuring Cutwater that they could find their way to the place of appointment without his assistance, they returned to the corner of the High Street, where they found Jack, Roger Upton, Lucy and Beatie waiting for them.

They were walking up Church Hill when Jack heard the sound of a well-known siren screeching, and as they passed the corner of Lyemouth Road the Horrexes' Rolls Royce came sweeping round on its way to the tennis club ground.

Jack and Lucy exchanged glances. Lance Perryman was driving, with Adoline Horrex beside him. Behind was Mabel in eager conversation with Colonel Burnside.

Would Sara Teague recognise Mabel?

Roger looked at Jack and grinned.

"Lord!" cried Sara. "Don't that motor look a treat!"

All might have gone well from Jack's point of view, had not Lance Perryman caught sight of Lucy walking beside Roger. Instead of continuing to swing the car round into Cutt Street he slowed down and, beaming all over his comical face, waved his straw hat with his right hand while he controlled the wheel with his left.

"Go on. Don't stop now, please," said Mabel, leaning over from the rear part of the car where she was enjoying Percy Burnside's compliments, while Adoline flirted ardently with her beautiful one-pip loot.

Lance obeyed, but his recognition of the walking party was pounced upon by Sara, and her attention being drawn to the occupants of the car, she recognised in Mabel the original of a photograph which she had seen at Lambyre Road.

Delighted to think that she made one of a party greeted so familiarly by the driver of such a car, she snatched her handkerchief from her pocket and waved it frantically.

Adoline, having her attention drawn to Jack, bowed effusively, which sent Sara into the seventh heaven of delight.

"Lor, Jack!" she cried, "'oo's thet? Thet lidy beyind is a friend of Mibel's. I've seen 'er photo at your 'ouse."

It was useless to lie about it. When Mabel returned home, Sara could not fail to recognise her. The only way out of it was to send Mabel a message that she had better remain at Cockleview for the night. Jack was about to give Sara a fictitious name when he was forestalled by Beatie. "Why," said the child, "don't you know mammy when you see her?"

"Of course. But I ain't seen 'er for fifteen year and more. Lor! Hi! Hi!" she shouted. "Jack," she appealed to him. "Stop the car. I want to speak to 'er."

What she really wanted was to be introduced to the other occupants of the car. There was no mistaking their social position. Their looks and bearing were enough to place them on a higher plane than anyone seen in the town that morning. And there was Mabel, disporting herself with them like one of themselves! How lucky she had come down! Now, indeed, she would reap the fruits of her marriage with a captain. For, of course, Mabel would make her known to these "swell" friends.

"No. No." said Jack. "Don't do that. They are—they are going a long way, and have no time to stop now."

"Well, that's somethin' like," said Sara. "Did ye see 'em, Brine! How'd you like to see your wife drivin' about in a car with them toffs? Hay? Up to dick, ain't it?"

The coarse woman radiated satisfaction. Lucy and Roger were hard put to it to control their laughter, and Jack, after being furious for a moment, caught Roger's look, and bit his lips to keep from an explosion.

"D'you mean as that was Mabel?" asked Brian. "And she never stopped to speak to 'er sister! Well, I call that—but there! I ain't used to you people! I should have thought one sister would have stopped the car she was in to speak to a sister stayin' in her house. Look here, Jack. D'ye mean you are ashamed of mammy and me? If so, you've only got to say the word!"

"Be quiet, Brine," said Sara. "You don't know the etiketty of 'igh sassiety. In course she couldn't 'ave 'er wye. It wasn't 'er car. I do 'ope they ain't visitors. Lor, what nice nyebours they'll be for us!"

"You don't seem to mind your wife drivin' about with fellers talkin' to her," said Brian to Jack.

"They are officers," explained Jack. "Going to a tennis party."

"Well, I don't understand it. I shouldn't let mammy go about like that, and what's more I'll see that she doesn't."

Jack saw a chance of diminishing Brian's eagerness to leave his wife at Cocklemouth when he left for his ship. "Oh," he said. "There is nothing in that. All women do that sort of thing in her set. I should make a fool of myself if I objected."

He did not think it necessary to say that until he himself had enabled his wife to make the acquaintance of the Horrexes, Mabel had had no chance of driving about in a car with anyone, and had wasted the sweetness of herself on Tompkins. It was his game to persuade the Teagues, or at least Brian, that these motor spins and tennis parties were common incidents of Mabel's life. No doubt this would add to Sara's eagerness to remain at Cocklemouth. But Jack felt sure that she dared not disobey her husband. When Brian put his foot down he would be obeyed.

"I must sye," said Sara, "I think Mibel might 'ave styed at 'ome to-dye."

"Yes. I don't call it sisterly," said Brian.

"Well, you'd better have it out with her," said Jack, who was getting very weary of his guests. He began to think that it would be well to come to close quarters soon. He might be able to disgust the Captain so much that he would not remain for the night. He was getting tired of sparing Brian's feelings. A man who could not see the intense vulgarity of Sara could not have very delicate feelings. Moreover, he took too much upon himself.

Jack's face was dark when he opened the door of his house. "Mrs. Teague can show you your room," he said to Brian. "Roger, you'd like a wash before lunch, wouldn't you?"

Lucy laid her hand on Jack's arm. "Don't be upset, Jack," she said. "I see that you are afraid that Sara will try to stay on. Leave it to me and Mabel. You need not fear that."

"If that ass Perryman had not spotted us it would have been all right," said Roger. "I don't think the others saw us, and they would have been round the corner in an instant."

His admiration for Lucy had increased during the morning's walk. Instinctively, he felt that Lance would be a rival for her favours.

He was stimulated by the idea to think how charming a wife she would make. Hitherto, he had merely regarded her as a beautiful unaffected and well-mannered girl. But the look in Lance's eyes when he saw her that morning roused Roger to consider the possibility of loving her. He was thoughtful, as he accompanied his friend to the lavatory at the end of the hall passage.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TENNIS CLUB

At the beginning of the season the finances of the Cocklemouth tennis club had been in a precarious state. The members were faced with a difficulty which is not uncommon. They desired to keep the club as select as ever, but they wanted more members for their subscriptions. Of course no one could be elected who was connected with trade in any way. Carrie Aggett had succeeded in gaining admission, because her father was an old member. The father was tolerated as a professional man, a dentist. But when Carrie disgraced herself by acting as governess to two children in the town, she had to endure many snubs at the club, although her father escaped contumely, because it was believed that Carrie had taken up her work contrary to his wishes. Victoria Vantage, who kept the school to which Beatie Greenfield went, was tolerated. She was of a very old Cocklemouth family, and regarded as eccentric. Besides, keeping a school was different from going out as a daily governess—and really Victoria took no trouble with her pupils.

Hampered by the necessity for remaining "select," the club committee found it difficult to attract new members. When Adoline Horrex offered a cheque for fifty guineas on condition that she and her friends should be at liberty to use the club premises and courts whenever they wished, the chance of improving the financial condition of the club was eagerly seized upon. It was true that Mrs. Horrex's husband had made his enormous fortune by coal. But a fortune so large gave a respectability even to commerce.

All attempts to snub Adoline met with a disastrous debâcle. That light-hearted lady, greeted the petty insolences, which had previously been found effective, with roars of laughter, and mimicked the old-fashioned frumps to their faces, so that the lean spinsters and haggard dowagers, the adipose bolsters and elephantine freaks who had previously ruled the roost because no one had cared to attack their position, entrenched on a mountain of ignorance and self-conceit, drew their frowsy skirts together and huddled, shivering against one another to escape the gusts of contemptuous ridicule which now beat upon them like blasts from a wind frost.

Too late did the old members of the tennis club discover that they were no longer the dictators, no longer the masters and mistresses of their own club premises. When the Cockleview party invaded the courts it swept all before it, and sent the "old antics," who had once lorded it there with an air of patronising condescension peculiar to them and their offshoots, shivering to the garden seats, where they sat and cackled, gabbling and squeaking, in futile indignation. Some of the older members, such as Carrie Aggett, who had suffered from the vulgar effrontery of the local snobs, both elderly and youthful, observed their rout with delight, and were content to be themselves ousted from the courts by Adoline and her guests, since their former oppressors were at last put in their place.

It was characteristic of a society, such as that composed of the frumps and fogies herein described, that members of it should endeavour to "play booty" and toady to the plutocrats. Certain persons like Mrs. Speke, Mrs. Black (of Raincombe), and Mrs. Bristle, who had attempted to curry favour with Adoline by fawning upon her and been repulsed, were now naturally the most bitter in their comments, and did not hesitate to accuse her of immorality of such a kind as could only exist in the putrid imaginations of Cocklemouth natives. The "last ditchers," like Mrs. Stukeley and her daughter, sneered at the backsliders, and laughed at their repulse for a time. But the attempted secession was soon forgotten; for the natives found that even though they mustered all their strength, and were as true to their alliance as it is possible for people of that kind to be, they could make no headway against Adoline's forces. A split in the home defences would mean shameful and immediate rout. So the local magnates hid their mutual causes of difference for the time, and united to show a bold front to the enemy.

At heart there was hardly one of the home party who would not have been willing to betray her allies for the certainty of being accepted as one of the Cockleview set. The fact that the certainty lay the other way, alone held the local forces together. And even then most of them fought with a wary eye on the opposite side, lest a chance should be missed of profitable desertion.

No doubt some such struggle goes on in many provincial towns. But there are few places where the ignorance, natural stupidity, and reckless malice of the inhabitants form so fertile a soil for the cultivation of grotesquely humorous social battles as is the case at Cocklemouth.

Lance Perryman, driving the Rolls Royce, ran down Cutt Hill, a little way up the rise before the road to Mooredge branches off to the bridge across the Cockle estuary to Raincombe, and halted at a green gate let into a long stone wall which divided the tennis club grounds from the public road, and prevented the members from being overlooked except from the estuary and the bridge.

Painted in large black letters on the gate were the words: "PRIVATE. COCKLEMOUTH TENNIS CLUB. MEMBERS ONLY."

Lance stopped his engine, and the car drew up against the curb at a sufficient distance from the gate to permit the approach of other cars or conveyances. Then the merry party descended and gathered in the roadway. Their voices brought aproned women to the doors of the houses they had just passed, and so vexed Mrs. Bristle in the grounds that she clean missed the hoop through which she was endeavouring to drive her croquet ball.

"Come along, boys and girls," said Adoline. "And collar a court as soon as one's empty."

She spoke at the top of her voice, and her words were audible half-way across the enclosed premises of the club.

It was her policy to make no pretence of caring twopence for what the local people thought of her. She knew there could be nothing in common between them, and that though the natives would have been delighted to pretend to be on good terms with her, to her face, they would slander and backbite her with all their cultivated venom behind her back. So she declared open warfare, and made it with undaunted courage.

The Cockleview party streamed through the gate, down the winding pathway among the ancient ilexes and elms, which bordered the smooth shaven lawns, to the courts. All of these were engaged.

The players were daughters of the town, with one old gentleman, who would evidently have been more at home at croquet. About the sward and under the trees was seated a number of dowdy women, all looking strangely aged, with curiously hard, wrinkled faces, made grotesque in many instances by cosmetics, powder and carmine, and from whom a reek of strong scent permeated and poisoned the air.

"Come with me, dear," said Adoline to Mabel. "I want you to see how I clear a court. It will be a lesson in the right way of managing the local oafs. Don't upset yourself, Percy," she said to Burnside.

"Wasn't going to," replied the gallant Colonel, with an ardent eye on Mabel. "I'm going to wait. Promised to stroll round with Mrs. Greenfield, don't you know." He stroked his moustache, and looked amorously at his latest flame from beneath his long curling, dark eyelashes. He had always been a lady's man, and was an expert both at the game which means nothing and leads nowhere (that is if it is conducted on both sides with due regard to the rules understood by experienced players), and the more perilous form of intrigue. He was not yet quite certain in which category to place his *affaire* with Mabel. But he was inclined to think that, like Adoline, she would pretend to a lack of virtue which she nevertheless possessed.

The modern rage for *la joie de vivre* is responsible for much histrionic naughtiness, and, as has already been intimated, the tendency towards insincerity in all things must be remembered in endeavouring to get at the real character of a woman, who often wantonly makes herself seem far naughtier than she is.

There are thousands of women like Adoline who are really women who never kick clean over the traces, but whose reckless behaviour and sheer bravado afford some excuse for the prunes and prisms puritans for turning up the whites of their bleary eyes at the mere mention of their names.

"I want you, Lance," said Adoline. "You are always useful at these times."

Accompanied by the Colonel, Lance, Mabel and her own handsome lieutenant, Adoline tripped down towards one of the courts engaged, her pretty eyes dancing mischievously.

"Come, my dear," she said. She put her hand through Mabel's arm and led her down till they stood close to the players. From the members of the club, whether playing or not, scarce a word had been heard since the entrance of the party from Cockleview.

Adoline took up her stand as if to judge the game, and began to criticise the play aloud.

At first Mabel would have liked to sink into the ground. But as Adoline continued her bland insolence she remembered what she had endured from the people who were now undergoing reprisals, and she took courage.

"Funny people, what?" said Adoline. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Isn't the club select? You know I'm not a member. I only bought the right to use the courts for my friends and myself. Mrs. Speke, the parson's wife, impressed it upon me that I was not elected a member. Aren't they funny?"

Of course it was all quite inexcusable. But Adoline knew that it would be efficacious. Had she shown any delicacy, had she cared in the least whether she hurt the feelings of the club members or not, her party would never have got a chance at the courts. Nothing would have pleased the members of the club more than to take her money and then cheat her out of the privilege for which she had paid. But Adoline was too smart to permit that."

"Joohoolia! Joohoolia!" came in a dismal hoot from beneath a green sunshade. "Come hoom at wance! The club is not fit for leedies any longer. Come hoom, Joohoolia."

The girl called flung down her racket in a temper. "I'd have kept on playing if only to spite her ma," she called out.

"You can't doohoo it," hooted the mother.

Mabel turned round and looked at the sallow face now peeping out from beneath the green sunshade. "Do you know," she said to Adoline, "that that woman once told me that she did not desire my acquaintance ? "

" Well, damn it," said Adoline. " Surely you didn't want hers."

By this time most of the players had given up. Quite a little gathering of women had assembled round Mrs. Bristle, the woman with the green sunshade. Their heads were bobbing together, their sticks, umbrellas, and parasols entangling their legs, and a sibilant cackle hissed over the grounds. Lavinia Speke, the vicar's wife, an enormous woman, who rolled rather than walked, and whose bloated, podgy features were moist and swollen with the heat of the day, was honking in her raucous, throaty voice. " Do not go, Mrs. Bristle," she honked. " It will never do to give in to them. They will get worse and worse ! Sit down again, and let us watch them and make remarks about them ! The ideeah ! A woman whose husband no one knows, and another whose husband made his money in trade ! "

" What a pity it is that the woman's cheque was taken," said Mrs. Bristle.

" That is all very well," said Mrs. Speke, who was one of the committee. " We had to get money somewhere, and there were no new members available whom we could have admitted. You wouldn't like us to have elected that Greenfield woman ! "

" Did she put up ? " cried Mrs. Bristle.

" Not to my knowledge. I only mentioned her as an example of the class we might have had to elect if we had not taken the money. We were quite without funds. But let us change the subject. I nevah talk about money matters."

That Mabel Greenfield should have become so intimate with Adoline was a bitter draught for many of the Cocklemouth women to swallow. Had anyone of them known that within half a mile were the means of bringing shame and humiliation upon Mabel in the midst of her friends it would have been hard to prevent the appearance of Sara Teague on the tennis ground, and the rest might be left to her.

But Mabel was so engrossed with her new friends, and so charmed by Burnside's adroit lovemaking—which was always ardent enough to interest and rarely violent enough to alarm—that she had forgotten the Teagues, though her heart had leapt to her mouth when Lance Perryman called out to Lucy at the corner of Lyemouth Road and Cutt Street.

"I mean to call," said Cora Black, a woman of about forty-five, who used kohl plentifully for her great languishing eyes, and brightened her plump cheeks with carmine even more than most Cocklemouthians of her age. There was a good deal of scandal about Cora, but as the tales told of her might have been told with equal truth of most women of Cocklemouth under fifty and with any pretensions to being tolerably attractive, she did not lose caste in the extraordinary Cocklemouth society. No one was louder in abuse of strangers, or of women who were careless enough to make it impossible to pretend to be blind to their conduct than was Cora. And all that was asked of the local élite was a certain discretion. Cora was always discreet. Discretion is carried to a high pitch at Cocklemouth, and one is expected to give and take.

Nowhere in the world could a town be found where the people were readier to toady and fawn upon rank or wealth than they are at Cocklemouth. Had Adoline Horrex chosen, she could have had three quarters of those who called themselves "the better-most people" of Cocklemouth licking the dirt off her shoes. Even to Mrs. Black and Mrs. Stukeley trade ceased to defile when its profits were measured by millions. Mrs. Bristle would have died rather than speak to Farwell the grocer outside his shop—in which she daily insulted him—but I am greatly mistaken if she would not have gone on her knees to be introduced to Sir Thomas Lipton or Mr. Julius Drew. But she and the others about her knew that they had no chance of becoming on good terms with Adoline, so they refused to jump for the sour grapes, and presently left the club grounds, muttering scandal as they slouched or stalked into the road.

The Cockleview party did not play tennis long. As Burnside pointed out they were an odd number, and though Lance offered to stand out and pick up the balls, the Colonel soon had his way. It is probable that Adoline took more joy in the conflict with the natives than in the game, and preferred flirting with her lieutenant in the shade to rushing after a tennis ball on so warm an afternoon. Lance saw that he was one too many, and went out to tinker about the car.

Burnside, an adept in the art, had paired off with Mabel and slipped Adoline and her escort with the utmost ease, partly because they were quite willing to be slipped.

As the afternoon drew on his compliments became warmer, his voice more tender, his eyes more fiery. Mabel had taken to the game as a young duck takes to water. She discovered that she could be tantalising, elusive, fascinating, encouraging and yet sufficiently discreet.

Burnside led her along a *cul de sac*, thickly screened on either side by a tall hedge of yew and holly.

" It is hard," he said, " that I should only have got to know you so late. You have really been here, in this god-forsaken town, for three years, and I did not see you before you came up to dinner."

He slipped his arm round her waist. With a light laugh, and a graceful movement, she disengaged herself. " You seem to be losing no time now, Colonel," she said. "But do you know, I think you may go a bit too fast!"

Her eyes challenged his, her lips pouted promise of soft return, her thin bosom panted a little. There was the allure of the anæmic woman in her every line; not a healthy allure, but one which appealed to the jaded palate of Percy Burnside. His heart began to beat a little riotously. He was less under his own control than he liked to be. His eyes flamed and burnt as he placed his hands on her shoulders and forced her to look at him.

"You little devil," he said. "I believe you want to make me mad."

"Really, Colonel, you are very eccentric, are you not? Or am I to consider that you have paid me a compliment? Little devil! I think it sounds better than little angel anyhow."

"Angel! No one could call you an angel," said the man, savagely. He was getting trapped in his own gin, he, who flattered himself that he was as *experimenté* a maker of light love as could be found in all the eight millions of men in khaki.

He was a man whom many women would have found it hard to resist. His voice was trained to dalliance, his eyes educated in every expression. But now he was not quite master of himself, and, being more natural than usual, he lost some of his fascination for a woman who now knew that she loved the bizarre.

"You are coming back to dine, aren't you?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes. But I must be home early. I promised."

"Oh, diddums? Did the devoted wife promise hubby to be home early. Damnation. Are *you* going to pose as the virtuous wife?"

"Who is a crown to her husband? Certainly I am, Colonel Burnside."

"Mabel, don't call me Colonel. Can't you say Percy, or Perc?"

"I've no doubt I could say it. Whether it would be wise to do so is another thing. You see you want so much. You never seem satisfied. No. Don't do that."

He again slipped his arm round her and she again eluded him easily. But the man was now hungry for kisses, and borne beyond the usual temperate ardour with which he had been wont to carry on his love affairs. There was something in Mabel which maddened him. It may be that she was too inexperienced to be able to temper the allurement she emanated. She was not sufficiently skilled in radiating her charm to modify it as occasion arose, to encourage him at one moment and to cool him at another. Though she showed much skill at the game favoured by her new set of friends, she was a novice at it and played it by the light of nature. While this is wonderfully effective, it does not enable the players to indulge in the dainty *nuances* which make the ultimate harmlessness of the *amourette* possible. Neither had she yet attained to the skill necessary to gauge the temperature of her partner, to enable her to apply cooling treatment at the right moment.

Suddenly she felt herself caught in Burnside's arms, her mouth upturned to his, and his lips fastened avidly on hers, his kisses burning her, his mouth challenging hers so fiercely that the pressure pained her.

For a moment she struggled. Then something within her thrilled in response, and she found herself giving kiss for kiss, her arms flung round the man's neck.

It was not till the frenzy was over that she came to herself and thrust him from her. "No, no," she said. "Oh, Percy. You know I trusted you. I did not think you would have done that."

"I couldn't help it—and there's no harm done," said he, apologetically. But then he raised his head triumphantly. "You kissed me back," he said. "You kissed me back."

"If I did you ought not to remind me of it," she said. "No, not again. I won't trust you again."

She tried to push past him, and, after a moment, when he saw that she was sincere in wishing to escape from the secluded alley, he let her go.

"Shouldn't have thought she'd have picked up the game so quickly," he thought. "I took her for a little *bourgeoise* playing in strange grounds. But she seems to be able to handle a risky situation as if she'd been bred up in this atmosphere of trifling. Perhaps it is the better for both of us."

It was when she was at dinner that Mabel began to feel nervous. A note was handed to her while she was in the midst of telling Adoline the story of Mrs. Powter, the bank manager's wife, and Mrs. Bristle.

"Mary's tryin' to give you a note," said Colonel Burnside, taking the missive which one of the maids waiting at table was proffering on a salver. "I've a good mind to open it. It is from hubby! Now I bar notes from hubby, my dear lady."

"Don't be stupid, Percy," said Adoline, a little crossly. "I wish Captain Greenfield could have come. Perhaps——"

"Oh!" cried Mabel, glancing through the note. "Can you put me up to-night, Addie? Jack doesn't want me home to-night."

"The deuce he doesn't," cried Burnside.

Mabel looked at the missive again. "Dear Mabel, I think it would be best if you could manage to stay at Cockleview to-night after all. If Mrs. Horrex will put you up send me a line by the bearer. If once you meet these people it will be the deuce of a job to get rid of the woman. Since she saw you in the car she has quite made up her mind to stay on here after the man has sailed, and she is already boasting of the pleasure she anticipates in mixing with your friends. Your affectionate, Jack."

"Of course I can," said Adoline. "It will be much more convenient. Both the cars will be wanted to-night to take people home who live at some distance. I'm glad you can stay."

"So am I," the Colonel whispered.

"Who brought this ?" asked Mabel.

"A young person, your maid, I believe, madam," said Mary.

Mabel smiled. Jack must have bribed Gladys heavily to persuade her to spoil her night out by tramping up to Cockleview and then back again.

The suggestion that she should stay the night where she was was not unpleasant.

With a word of apology she left the table to scribble a reply. Evidently it would be well not to refer to the note she had received. She thought she understood the game which Jack was playing. "Dear Jack," she wrote, "I am staying here to-night. Please ask Lucy to put what I am likely to want in my dressing bag and send it up somehow. I daresay I shall not be home till late to-morrow. But I may see you in the town in the morning."

"I say, Mrs. Greenfield," Lance Perryman called out from the dining-room. "Please remind your sister that she has an appointment with me on the front to-morrow morning."

"Very well," replied Mabel, and added the words, "Lance Perryman wishes me to remind Lucy that she has an appointment with him on the front to-morrow morning. Perhaps we shall all meet there. Yours affectionately, Mabel."

When the reply was sent Mabel returned to her seat. Until she heard the Colonel whisper "what luck!"

in her ear, she had not felt any regret at the turn events had taken. For a moment she felt a little frightened.

This new life into which she had plunged so joyously had hardly seemed real to her. She was different from Adoline, because the latter was used to the conditions which obtained amongst her friends, and the real innocence of the perpetual love making was a matter of course to her. She and her friends had played the game so long that they no longer experienced any effort in controlling the development of the various little sham intrigues. But Mabel, though she had sustained her part with extraordinary adroitness for a novice, was not yet sufficiently expert, or hardened, to dismiss all natural emotion. Nor was she so confident that no tragedy, or at least melo-drama, would ever develop on the stage where she was.

CHAPTER XIV

STRAINED RELATIONS

"THERE!" said Brian Teague, as he held out his plate for a second helping of the beef that he had caused to be sent. "Did ye ever taste a better bit o' beef than that. And you shall have a joint sent ye once a week."

The more Jack thought about it the more difficult did it seem to broach the subject of making payment for the sirloin to the merchant skipper. "I'll write to the butcher and settle it in that way," he thought at last. "If only I can get rid of these two without a regular row I must be content."

There was no coyness about Brian or his wife. They were the guests of "Sapphire's" sister—why insist on the "half" sister—and therefore they were naturally welcome. So did it appear to the skipper's simple mind. Once or twice he had sniffed as though he imagined that there was less cordiality about than he had expected to find. But he had spoken the truth in saying that he did not understand Jack. He was not used to "folk like him." No doubt, he told himself, that it was not "etiketty" to display cordiality. Teague was entirely sincere. He would have done anything in his power to help Jack, Mabel or Lucy so long as he considered them to be relatives of his wife, and they seemed to consider his wife a relative. He could see no fault in Sara. In his eyes she was a brilliant, handsome woman, young and innocent, altogether desirable. That Mabel should look down upon her did not at first occur to the mariner. That his "Sapphire" should not be able to hold her own with credit in any society was incredible to him.

He lunched well, and when the meal was finished he retired with Jack to the boudoir, which the latter had used as his own den during his leave. Roger Upton hoped to be able to get Lucy to himself in the afternoon. If he could manage to pair off Beatie and Mrs. Teague this would be possible.

Lucy had no objection to this programme, and did her best to forward it. "Won't you show Mrs. Teague your Dorothy Perkins?" she said to the child. Beatie was generally ready to "show off" anything, including herself. And she had watered the climber twice or thrice, and treated it as though it were her own.

Sara did not wish to bother about a rose. But she thought she might be able to "pump" the child if she got her alone.

So she consented to accompany Beatie out towards the pergola, which stood half way up the steps to the road.

"Wait till I've put my 'at on," she said.

"Shall we go for a stroll?" Roger asked Lucy. "It is rather a pity to spend an afternoon like this indoors."

Lucy hesitated. "I don't like to leave Jack with them," she said.

"Oh, he'll be all right." Roger assured her. "You have not seen the bridge across to Raincombe yet, have you? Let me show you the way over there."

And Lucy permitted herself to be persuaded.

The two made their escape before Sara returned downstairs.

Tompkins saw Beatie and a woman in an egregious hat appear near the road, and determined to seize his opportunity. He had no intention of regarding as final Jack's request that his acquaintance with the Greenfields should cease. And he longed to see enough of this woman, who was clearly a *bête noire*, to be able to carry tales about her to as many Cocklemouthians as consented to be bored by him.

He would not do this at once. If he did he would spoil his game with Mabel, the game which would give him vengeance on Jack. He meant to make his attempt upon her soon. No doubt he would be successful. But—but—if he were not! Since she had been "taken up" by the Cockleview set, she had somehow seemed beyond his reach. Previously she had been only too grateful for his attentions. And he knew that he had been the only person in Cocklemouth who was willing to be intimate with her. Had he not kept her in vegetables? Had he not bought Beatie pounds and pounds of sweets?

It was a likely thing that he was to be thrown aside like an old glove as soon as her husband came home, without having a say in the matter! A very likely thing! But it had not been because of her husband that she had avoided him of late. That would have been more intelligible, more pardonable. He would have accepted that as a valid excuse, yes, though she should have paid for it when Jack was gone. The intolerable thing was that she was neglecting her husband too, for the sake of these Horrex people. Or so it seemed to him. Well, he would use that new friendship of hers for his own ends, and would compel her to help him to make one of the "swells," which he had long yearned to do. She could get him the *entrée* easily enough. And she should, when Jack was gone. In the meantime, it would be as well to obtain a weapon against her, should she prove traitress not only to his love but to his social ambition and his vengeance, should she seem inclined to shunt him now that she had made friends with people whom he could not but admit were superior in social standing to himself.

"Why, it's Tommy!" said Beatie, who was inclined to be more friendly to Sara since the latter had bought her some chocolates in the town that morning. "Tommy, mummy's out. Vis is Aunt Sapphire. Is vat right?" she asked Sara.

"Yus," boomed that lady. "Haunty Sapphire is right oh! 'Ow do you do, Mr. Tompkins. Pleased to know yer."

She held out her great podgy hand, covered by one of the yellow kid gloves for which her husband had paid a fabulous price, before the wedding.

Tompkins shook the bunch of sausages. "I wonder," he said, "you don't go to the tennis club to see your sister. Of coure she did not expect you so early in the day."

"But she's drove out an 'ell of a wye," objected Sara.

"Oh, no," said Tompkins. "She is only at the tennis club here. It is not ten minutes' walk."

Sara's eyes glittered, and her painted cheeks grew blotchy. "'Ow's that, Beatie," she said. "Didn't yer pa sye as she'd gorn a long wye aht?"

"Yes," said Beatie. "I fink you're wong, Tommy. I don't fink mummy's at the club here."

"Oh, yes she is," said Tompkins. "I saw 'er there. I saw 'er and 'er swell friends go in."

"There! Nah I call that crool! I'll wish ye good-dye, Mr. Tompkins," she added.

"I'll 'ave a word with my brother, thet I will and all!"

Sara went storming in, dragging Beatie behind her by one hand. The latter was now a little frightened. She knew she ought not to have encouraged Tompkins. She knew that her father disliked the man. And Tompkins had betrayed her mother's whereabouts, of which she herself had not been certain.

"Lead me to yer pa," cried Sara, her face gradually becoming purple as her fury increased.

"Brine!" she yelled, when Beatie had taken her to the "buddy," "Mibel's 'umbuggin' us! And so're you," she said, glaring at Jack. "You said as Mibel 'ad drove a long wye aht! Well, she 'ain't! She ain't ten minute walk horf!"

"I think you're wrong," said Jack. "But pray sit down. If she is not far off what difference does it make?"

"Why any man might know as I want to know them swells she was with in the motor. If she's close 'andy I want to go to 'er, and say 'ow d'ye do to 'er pals, don't ye see? Mr. Tompkins sye as she is close 'andy. So let's all on us go, Jack. Lor! You ain't 'arf a man to let yer wife go 'umbuggin' abaht with a fly lot o' fellers like what was with 'er in the motor! Not 'arf you ain't!"

Jack's colour rose.

"Please leave me to arrange my own affairs," he said. "Even if Mabel is at the local club ground we could not go there. I am not a member and only members are admitted."

"Is she a member?"

"I really don't know. But no doubt her friends are members, and they could take her in."

"Well, I must say," said Brian, "I think that she might have come home by this time, now that she saw us this morning."

"But," said Jack, "how should she have known it was you? Your wife did not recognise her, and I'm sure she would not know your wife. She may not know that you are here yet. Probably she does not."

"'Old on," objected Sara. "Thet won't do! She must 'ave seen us with yer. 'Oo did she think we was then?"

"She may not have thought you and the Captain were with our party. The street was rather full you know. And the car was going too fast for her to be able to see much."

"That is so, Sapphie," said Brian. "I daresay it's all right. Besides, why should she want to keep away from us? You're her own sister, aren't you? No doubt it will be all right, and when she comes home she will settle how to take you up to her friends."

It was this conversation which definitely decided Jack to send the note to Mabel. He thought that if she returned home it would make the inevitable quarrel the more bitter. He must do his best to get rid of these people before noon of the morrow. But how? The man seemed to have some sensitiveness. It was unpleasant to have to play upon that, but it was unavoidable. He would try to get Lucy and Roger out of the way, and then let the quarrel come to a head as soon as it might.

In the meantime, confident that there was no fear of encountering Mabel or any of the Cockleview set, he suggested that he and Beatie should escort his guests down on the front again, and in this way the afternoon was passed without further difficulties arising.

The time would come, he knew, when the Teagues learnt that Mabel would not return home that night.

While Jack was exercising such diplomatic powers as he possessed in postponing the coming quarrel till he was ready for it, Roger and Lucy were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Roger, who had been driven all round the country by Adoline in the days when he was the favourite for the moment, persuaded the girl to have tea with him at a confectioner's at Raincombe where Adoline had once taken him. He hired a light boat, and took the girl on the estuary, paddling easily about the channels. He tied up beneath an overhanging tree, lit a pipe to keep off the flies, and then lay back at

Lucy's feet and discoursed of men and women, war and love, books and plays, and, indeed, of every subject with which he thought he could hold the girl's attention, in which he might find that he shared some sympathy with her. And in that long quiet evening those two came to know each other better than most men and women know one another after a year's acquaintance.

Everything Lucy said or did charmed her companion. She was so sweet, so unaffected, so real, so tender, so "*simpatica.*" And when, in response to his pleading, she consented to send her voice across the water, its untrained sweetness, and the "singing" quality of her production, entranced him. He was inclined to be "smitten" in the morning. By the time that he led her back again to Lambyre Road he was sufficiently in love with her to admit it to himself.

And Lucy? She had never met a man like him before. For in the old days when she had seen much of Jack, he had not seen the world as had Roger Upton. Nor was he a man to be able to impart the impressions made upon him by experience as could Roger. Roger had the gift of dramatic insight and of dramatic expression. And he charmed the girl as she charmed him. His voice was rich and tender, vibrant even when low pitched, round and full, but never harsh. His poet's eyes were full of ardour, and yet of quiet dreams with which he soothed Lucy's fear lest the fires of passion should scorch her.

But while he had made up his mind to win her if he could, modest Lucy did her best to determine not to think too much of him. "I am no match for him," she thought. "Why, I used to look on Jack as a young God. And Jack was never like him. Oh no! I must not let myself get fond of him. He does not mean to make me fond of him. It is his manner. He cannot help being interesting and fascinating! I—I must not let him see how silly I am!"

So when, as he parted from her at the gate, he asked her to meet him on the front on the morrow, she choked down her heart's reply, and with an effort, brought a laugh to her lips. "But I can't, Major," she said. "You have had your turn this afternoon. You know I promised Captain Perryman to meet him on the front to-morrow."

"But you need not do it," pleaded Roger.

"Oh, but I must. I always keep my promises."

"You did not promise. I remember now what you said. Please, Miss Lightfoot, don't bother about that young ass. I—I want to meet you again much more than he does."

She longed to do as he wished. She would have liked to obey him in all things. But she was determined not to let her heart dwell on him, not to be tender to what she believed to be a hopeless love for him. She had only seen him two or three times. Surely she could keep from loving him when she knew that such love could only end in unhappiness. It would be better to let him think her unworthy than to break her heart over him. She would not pain him. She was certain that she would not pain him, or she could not have braced herself to play the part.

"But I wish to meet him," she said, holding her pretty head on one side, and forcing her lips to smile.

"Do you mean you would rather meet him than me?" asked Roger, who, being in love, was naturally a little unreasonable and a good deal jealous.

"It would be rude if I said yes, wouldn't it?" she asked. No finished coquette could have been more tantalising. But the words and manner sat incongruously on unaffected Lucy. Roger was angry with her, and with himself. There is no sourer meal than for a lover to eat his own heart. And Roger was chewing away at his as he turned on his heel. "I won't urge you against your wishes, Miss Lightfoot," he said. "Good-night."

And off he went, swearing and sore at heart.

Lucy waited at the gate, yearning after him. She hardly realised that the scene was over. That she had conquered! And when she saw that she had won, that she had sent him away without a suspicion that he was anything to her, she flung her hands to her face, and burst into bitter sobs. It is, nevertheless, possible that she enjoyed the ecstasy of grief, and had some suspicion that joy loomed ahead.

CHAPTER XV

"HUFFED"

"WELL, I don't understand you people," said Brian Teague for the fiftieth time, when Lucy made her way into the dining-room. Supper was on the table, for it would have been absurd to pretend to dine late when they had lunched at 2-45, and the only thing in the house to eat was the remains of the beef. "You leave your sister Sapphire all the afternoon, and Mabel—but there. I've owned she may not know we are here. I'll wait till that's clear ahead. But where've you been?"

Lucy looked at the man with surprise. "I've been where I chose to go," she said. "You didn't mind, Jack, did you?" she asked her brother-in-law.

"Of course not, dear," replied Jack, with a laugh. "You could have no one better to take care of you than Roger. I'm glad you get on so well with him. Had a good time?"

"Oh, yes. I thought you would not mind."

Teague scowled at her. "I suppose that's as much as to say it is not my business. But you're my wife's sister, ain't you? Then I'll make it my business if I like. How's that?"

"'Old your tongue, Brine," said Sara. "She's styin' with Jack, ain't she? Not wif you? You ain't no call to tell 'er what to do."

"I look at it this way," said Teague. "Now Mabel is not here Lucy is the lady of the house, and it don't show civility to us to go out and leave us at meal times. She ought to have been here to see to the supper, seein' the gal goes out. I don't let my servant go out when I want her," he said with a nod.

Beatie made an amusing interpellation. Her dignity was hurt. "Auntie Lucy doesn't belong here," she said. "When mummy's not here I'm in her place, not Auntie Lucy."

"Good for you, Beatie," said her father, laughing heartily. "And I must say you've behaved very well."

Indeed, Beatie had been on her best behaviour, and had played the hostess with commendable gravity, solicitude, and attention.

"I shall tell Mabel what I think," persisted Teague. "And if mammy's to stay here—— "

"I have already told you we cannot possibly put Mrs. Teague up," said Jack, who knew that Mabel's note might come at any minute now. It was quite an hour since Gladys had taken the note up to Cockleview, and she had promised to bring back the reply as soon as she received it. The servant knew her place when Jack was at home, and never attempted to take liberties with him, or to his knowledge.

"But I say it *can* be done. I say that you'll be a goin' away soon, and then there'll be plenty of room. If it comes to that, Lucy can go home."

"I have asked Lucy here to be a companion for Mabel," said Jack.

"Well, mammy will make a better companion for a flighty woman than Lucy—— " began Teague.

Jack sprang to his feet. "I must ask you not to speak of my wife in that way. That you do so simply shows that Mrs. Teague is quite unfit to be my wife's companion."

"Well, I want her to know them people as she was with this morning," persisted the skipper, who had been primed by his wife. "And, after all, it is Mabel's concern more than yours. I'll wait till she's home, She can't be long now. She's sure to prefer to have a grown woman who knows London life, to a girl like Lucy. Not," he added to Lucy, "as I've anything against you except your goin' off with the Major this afternoon. But I'll leave it to Mabel. She won't be long now."

At this point Gladys knocked at the door. "Here's a note for you, sir," she said, holding out the letter in her hand.

Jack grinned at Lucy. Evidently Gladys had never heard of a salver. Mabel did not seem to have trained her maid well.

He opened the letter perfectly aware of what he would find inside.

"Mabel won't be home to-night," he said.

"What?" cried Teague, "and you take it like that! Well, I don't understand people like you! You haven't been home a week yet and she stops out all night."

"It's kid, Brine, that's what it is," declared Sara. "Kid, and don't you mike no herror! Nah I *will* stye 'ere and mike her interdoose me to 'er swell pals!"

Her face flamed to a magenta hue, and her thick lips quivered with rage.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," cried Brian, springing to his feet. "So Captain Jack Greenfield, me and my wife ain't good enough for you! You get your things together, mammy. We won't stay where we ain't wanted. You took the beef all right. That was good enough for you if we wasn't! Come along, mammy. The sooner we find an hotel the better."

"Oh, damn you, and your beef too," cried Jack, goaded beyond his patience. "I never heard your name or the name of your wife, never knew she existed till I got your infernal letter. Mabel and Lucy have never had anything to do with your wife."

"Do you take his part?" Brian asked Lucy, who was looking at him, a little frightened by the fury in his eyes, and the menace of his writhing mouth.

"I never saw Sara till I saw her here," replied the girl.

"Who's Sara? My wife's name is Sapphire! I suppose you want to make her out common, is that it! Damn you," he cried, wrestling with his coat and prancing towards Jack, "I'll soon see who's the best man. Put 'em up!"

He flung off his captain's coat, and squared up to Jack, prancing and dancing with a buoyancy that was delightful to behold.

"Don't make an ass of yourself," said Jack, wearily. "Remember that you came here without any invitation, and that I've treated you with every consideration because I wished to spare your feelings. Not that woman's. She knew well enough that she had no right to pretend to be intimate with any of us. But you might have been deceived, and I took that into consideration. Of course, your wife's name is Sara. Did you ever hear anyone called Sapphire? Oh, if you insist on it——"

For Jack's words only seemed to infuriate the other the more, and the squat, stocky little captain bounced about, thrusting out his enormous fists within an inch or two of Jack's nose.

Jack put his hands up, and there would probably have been a rough and tumble but for the women. As soon as Sara saw that Jack would stand no more, she let out a most stupendous yell, and flung herself upon him.

"You coward!" she yelled, "to strike a man 'alf yer size!"

"I ain't afraid of him," shouted Brian. "I've been a boxer in my time. Get on one side, mammy."

Jack put his hands down again, when he had evaded the clutching fingers of Sara, and sank down into his seat with a weary sigh. The thing was too preposterous! He felt ashamed of being mixed up with such a vulgar row.

"Put yer coat on agin," Sara said to her husband, holding that garment up, with the arm holes exposed and ready for his hands. "You ain't in Hireland now. You must beyive diffrunt 'ere to what you do in Hireland."

Sara was furious at the thought that her last chance had disappeared of ever rising in the social scale by Mabel's help. It was true that she had had her doubts of the reception she would have at Cocklemouth, and had been agreeably surprised by Jack's civility and hospitality. She knew that she had deceived her husband, and she knew his terrible temper when once it was roused.

She did not wish to turn out at that time of night, and she dreaded what Brian might do when he was alone with her and no longer had Jack on whom to wreak his anger.

"Captain Jack 'ave been fair enough," she said. "I told yer we oughter 'ave wited to 'ear if it was convenient to 'ave us dahn. You don't want to turn us aht to-night, do ye, Captain Jack? You harsk 'im, Luce, if we cawn't stye the night."

"Good lord, I don't care if you stay or not," said Jack. "But you'll understand that I can't offer you a bed after to-night. To tell you the truth, I think the less we see of each other the better, after your husband's exhibition. But there is one thing I should like to settle. Lucy, do you know how much sirloin of beef is a pound? What would that joint come to?"

"About twelve shillings, I think, Jack," said Lucy.

"Then there is the carriage. Here," he said to Brian," I insist on your taking this. Otherwise, I think you'd better do as you proposed, and look for an hotel."

Poor Sara, seeing her last hopes departing, was now more furious with her husband than with Jack, or either of her half-sisters. She had, she thought, got on well enough with Tompkins. But for this absurd quarrel, she believed she could have persuaded Mabel to make her known to the " toffs." She forgot that it was she who started the quarrel, by declaring that Mabel's absence was " kid." She attributed the failure to her husband's temper, and, while Jack was in the room, she did not fear Brian's violence. She had seen him knock a man about—a friend of his own—who, according to him, had looked at her as he had no right to look at " a respectable married woman." She knew that her husband was capable of giving her a thorough good thrashing. He would be sorry afterwards. But while his temper raged, he was not responsible for his actions. She could say things to him while she was protected by the presence of Jack and Lucy, which she would not dare to say when alone with him.

And then her ignorant self-complacency whispered to her, that if they stayed till Mabel returned the quarrel might be patched up, and she might win her end after all.

" Take it, Brine," she said to her husband. " Don't upset Captain Jack no more. And you oughter sye you're sorry. I'm shore he hain't done nothink but what's kind. 'Ow was 'e to know as Mibel wasn't comin' 'ome ? "

" Why, you said it was kid yourself," objected Brian.

" Yus, but I meant 'er kid ! Not Captain Jack's. Come, Brine, sye yer sorry and tike the money, and be thankful we're let stye 'ere arter your tantrums. Orferin' to fight an orfser in the harmy and all ! "

"Damme, and I'd have knocked his ruddy head off," cried Brian, still simmering with rage.

"We can't 'ave yer Hirish wyes 'ere! I've told ye so biffore! You and yer Herin, as you call hit! And a nice lot the Heriners must be. Bloaters I should call yer, not arf. Robbin' all yer first wife's julery and what not? Herin! Good old Hengland's good enough for me, and good old Hengland won't put up with yer tantrums. 'Old aht yer' 'and to Captain Jack. Do tike it, please mister," she said to Jack. "'E don't know no better! 'E's 'alf a wild Hirishman, and when 'is paddy's hup 'e dunno 'ah to beyive."

Brian had by this time struggled into his coat. His chin still stuck out aggressively, and there was still a springiness about his action which would have won the heart of old Weller.

He looked sullenly at Jack. "Look here, Jack," he said. "Did you mean anything against mammy? Do ye mean as she ain't fit for her own sister to 'sociate with her?"

"You know what I said," replied Jack, who was obstinate by this time, and who had not the slightest intention of conciliating this ruffian, as Brian appeared to him.

"There, Brine, thet's enough. I'm shore the Capting never said nothing to compline abaht! Harsk 'im to shike 'ands, or as true as Gord hi'll——"

"You'll—you'll what?"

"Never you mind what. I cawn't sye 'nah and 'ere. You know well enough. And as true as Gord I will."

Of course the man was preposterous. But his good faith was patent. And if he had erred through his trust in his wife, the poor devil would suffer enough from his marriage without adding to his troubles. He might be a bit of a bully, an illiterate barbarian, but he was not a blackguard, and he was certainly infinitely preferable to Tompkins. The thought of Tompkins hardened Jack's heart towards his wife far more than the fact that she had concealed the existence of her half-sister Sara. Hang it! How could he, Jack, pose as degraded by association with a brave man like Teague when he had found a cad and a skrimshanker like Tompkins installed as a friend of the house?

So when Brian held out his hand, Jack took it with a smile. "That's better," he said. "It hardly seems necessary to quarrel when we may never set eyes on each other after to-morrow."

Sara's face fell at these words. She had hoped that Jack might relent and consent to her staying at least a day or two now that he had taken her husband's hand. She knew that she could manage Brian, and could pursuade him to swallow almost anything by telling him that he was not in Ireland now, and that people did not do so and so in England. It was only when he was "in his tantrums" that he was unmanageable. Well, well she would wait and see how things looked in the morning. It might be as well to get to bed and avoid the chance of any further trouble arising between the two men.

She was about to suggest retirement when Brian said. "Let's wet it then, Jack. We didn't finish both them bottles."

Jack fumed a little. But he swallowed his wrath, and placed the rum and whiskey that was left on the table, while Lucy fetched water and glasses.

"Here," said Brian. "You hain't tried that backy yet. Give it here, and I'll show ye how to cut it."

Well, well it was useless to make further fuss. Jack produced one of the cakes, which he had forgotten, and determined to slip the others into the skipper's coat pockets before the latter left the house.

Brian palmed the cake, and producing a sharp knife, shaved away sufficient of the plug for a pipeful, then rubbed it well up in his horny palms, and held out his hand for Jack's pipe. He filled this and handed it back to Jack, and presently the really fine tobacco soothed the irritation which Brian had roused in his host that night.

"'Ere's 'ealth," said Sara, gulping down a stiff tot, and reaching for a second dose.

"Luck," said Brian, nodding to Jack. "And no ill feeling."

"Jack," said Lucy, when she kissed her brother-in-law good-night. "Don't let Mabel stay longer at Cockleview. You've done all you can and—and she ought to take her share of the bothers."

"All right," replied Jack. "It does not matter now. She might just as well have been here all the time as affairs have turned out."

"I'm not sure," said Lucy. "I think it was better for her to be away to-day, and, perhaps, to-night. But the Teagues will go to-morrow, and then I suppose she will come home."

"Why, of course she will! What are you thinking of, dear?"

"Oh! Nothing. Only—oh! I don't know. Good-night, Jack."

"Can't be jealous!" mused Jack, as he smoked his last half-pipe by himself—that last half-pipe which is always so sweet! "She's not a girl to care about knowing people like Mrs. Horrex."

He thought for a moment and then smiled. "At all events," he mused, "Mabel has got rid of her silly jealousy of her, or she would never have suggested staying the night at Cockleview."

He was about to take up one of the bottles which Brian had brought, the rum bottle, which was not quite empty, but he shook his head. "Not me," he muttered. "I could not very well refuse to have a drink when he pressed it on me, but hanged if I'll take any when he is not here. Quaint notion, by the way, to bring things down to a man and then serve 'em out as though he still retained the ownership so to speak. But lord bless my heart, the man does not mean any harm. He is choleric though, and I'm glad to have got through the evening without a stand-up fight! It came deuced near it! Thank goodness, they will go to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI

SARA'S IDEA

WHEN Brian Teague woke on the morning following, his natural good nature had restored the feeling of fraternal kindliness towards Jack, which his hasty and choleric temper had temporarily destroyed on the previous evening. He nudged his wife in the ribs. "Mammy," he said, "perhaps I was too hard on brother Jack last night. I dessay he's all right. But I can't help feelin' that Mabel is fightin' shy of us. D'ye think she really knows we're here ?"

Sara, in none too good a temper, for being roused out of a sound sleep by a dig in the ribs, grunted. "'Ow can she be horf it ?" she said. "They 'ad the wire sayin' we was comin', and if you harsk me it's all kid about 'er not reckernisin' of us when we see 'er in the motor."

"That's how I feel about it. But that ain't to say as Jack could help it. He's been friendly enough till I miscalled Mabel, and I don't think the worse of a man for stickin' up for his wife. How'd you like it if I let a man miscall you and never said nothin' ?"

"Friendly you call 'im, do yer ? Abaht as friendly as a lump o' ice. But look 'ere, Brine. If 'e won't give 'is brother and sister 'ouse room, I s'pose I can pye me wye at lodgin's. I don't like to leave 'ere without 'avin' a proper try to get ter know them torfs. Now, what sye ? Why shouldn't I stye on 'ere when you go ?"

"No larks now, mammy," said Brian. "I don't half like leavin' you by yourself. Those officers look to me to be a gay lot. They know a good thing when they see it, and I believe they'll be after you like wasps after treacle."

Sara bridled.

"Oh, get horf it!" she cried, coyly. "I know 'ow to take care of meself. If any bloke comes messin' abaht me, I'll send 'im horf wiv a thick ear. Tehe!"

"'There's my precious! She'll be true to her captain, won't she?"

Sara sniffed. "Then what sye, Brine?" she asked again. "Shall I stye on 'ere if Mibel don't come 'ome and do the proper thing!"

"Do as you like, my darlin'. You shan't never be able to say as I crossed ye in anything reasonable. And I own it is reasonable as you should be friends with your own sister's friends if you wish it."

"Then you look after Jack and Luce this mornin' while I 'ave a look rahnd."

"She may come back this mornin' and make all right."

"Ah! She mye. But I'll bet she won't. D'ye think it would be any good to harsk Mr. Tompkins? He seemed willin' to be friendly."

Now, though Brian was unable to see what sort of woman he had for a wife, he was no poor judge of a man. And his opinion of our friend Timothy Tompkins has already been recorded. "If you'll take my advice," he said, "you'll have nothin' to do with that lubberin' shark. He's no good."

Sara had her own ideas on the subject. But the great thing was to get her husband to leave her in Cocklemouth. She could do as she pleased when he was gone.

"You know best," she said.

Their further conversation was stopped by Gladys rapping at the door, and calling out that breakfast would be ready in half an hour.

CHATPER XVII

MABEL DISGRUNTLED.

JACK had his own reasons for uneasiness that morning. By the first post a letter had come from the war office, requiring his attendance at Whitehall by ten o'clock on the following day. That meant that he would have to leave Cocklemouth that afternoon. Would he be able to get rid of the Teagues before his departure ?

He had risen long before the Teagues woke, and had had his swim, when he met Roger Upton, and the two men agreed to spend the greater part of the day together, Roger saying that he would be round at Lambyre road before ten o'clock.

His summons to town which he found on his return from his swim made no difference to his arrangement with Roger. Indeed, he was glad to know that he would have his friend's assistance during the day. Now that he had to leave Cocklemouth, he felt less easy at Mabel's growing intimacy with Adoline Horrex. "But," he argued with himself, "I should have had to leave her soon anyhow, and my absence in town for a day or two may enable me to judge how she will behave when I have gone to France."

He was already discussing the new situation with Lucy, when the Teagues came down to breakfast.

"Mornin' Jack," said Brian, who was incorrigible in his inability to understand that his brother-in-law disliked him to call him by his Christian name. "No ill feelin'."

"Oh, no," said Jack. "Er—er I've been looking up the trains for you."

"I don't trust no time-tibles," said Sara, seeing a chance to get away to hunt for lodgings. "Me and Brine are a goink dahn to the stition to harsk abaht the trines this mornin'."

"You won't mind us leavin' ye?" asked Brian, seeing his wife's idea. "O' course you can come with us if you like."

"I'm afraid I shall not have time this morning," replied Jack, wondering that any man should be so dense. "Major Upton is coming up for me at ten."

"Then me and Brine will go dahn to the stition when we've ate our breakfast," said Sara, with a wink at her husband. "Where's Beatie?"

"Not down yet. Oh, here she is."

Beatie evaded Sara's embrace. The child disliked the woman, though she tolerated her for the sake of the sweetmeats she had given her. "Is mummy coming home this morning, daddy?" she asked. She missed her mother's attention. It was mortifying to her to find that she was not the first person to be considered, and no one except her mother seemed to consider her wishes as paramount.

Now was it advisable that Mabel should return home before the departure of the Teagues or not? Would the latter be induced to go without having spoken with Mabel at all? The man certainly was compelled to join his ship. But what about Sara? She was the fly in the ointment, and she could twist her husband round her little finger, except when his temper was roused.

"I don't know, dear," replied Jack.

"If I was you I'd go up and fetch her," said Brian. "She must know as Sapphire is here, and it ain't sisterly not to come and see her."

"Nor I shan't leave this place till I do see 'er," said Sara, firmly. "And if she don't come 'ome, why

I shall go hup to 'er friends' 'ouse and harsk for 'er. They won't 'ardly refuse to let 'er own sister see 'er.

"Good lord!" thought Jack. "What have I done to be saddled with these people? It was too bad of Mabel not to tell me about them."

But immediately he admitted that this was unfair to his wife. Lucy confirmed her in her statement that the Lightfoots had never recognised Sara as a relation, had never seen anything of her, and Jack would take Lucy's word in anything. Still it was hard lines that when he had looked forward to an enjoyable leave, all these complications should have arisen.

"I should not do that," he said. "It is a long way up and it's going to be a very hot day. Besides, she will probably be out when you get there. I daresay, if she does not come home she will motor down the town with some of them."

"P'raps I shall see 'er on the wye dahn to the stition. If I do, I'll lay she'll reckernise me this time" chortled Sara.

Jack began to talk about the news in the morning's paper, and no further reference to Mabel was made till the arrival of Roger Upton, who strolled in a little after ten o'clock bearing a peace offering for Lucy, in the shape of a great bunch of late roses.

In spite of her determination to check the affection for him which she believed could only end in unhappiness, Lucy was unable to repress an ardent look of gratitude. She was standing by the window when Roger gave the flowers to her, apart from the others who were clustered at the door.

"You'll forgive me," he said in a low tone. "I know I ought not to have spoken as I did. But—but if you knew my reason I am sure you—you——"

"I was silly to be cross," she replied, in a low voice.

"Of course," persisted Roger, with the utter fatuity which men in love occasionally display, "it is not my business with whom you associate. I have no right to object to your meeting Perryman."

"Of course you have not," said Lucy.

"But you'll forgive me."

"Oh, Major Upton, are you not making a great deal out of very little? There is nothing to forgive."

She swept past him, and followed Sara and Beatie upstairs to prepare to go down the town.

Brian had already made his way to the boudoir, and lit his pipe.

"Well, old man," said Upton to Jack. "Are they going?"

"I hope so. They are now going down to the station to look up trains. And I've got to go up to town. The War Office writes me to be there at ten to-morrow morning. To tell you the truth I'm not very keen on going just now."

"Hum, it *is* rather a pity," said Roger, looking at his friend.

"I suppose," said Jack, "things really are all right up at Cockleview. I've heard one or two rumours about Mrs. Horrex, you know."

"Oh, I think so. I don't say I'm particularly keen on her little ways. But it's mostly bravado. Er—er—I suppose you don't intend to encourage Miss Lightfoot to mix with her and her friends much, do you?

Roger looked at the tips of his well brushed boots.

"Luce? I don't think she'd care for 'em. What I mean is that my wife seems to get on with 'em, and she'll probably be there a good deal when I'm not here."

"She's not likely to lose her head I should think," said Roger. He had summed up Mabel with commendable accuracy, and did not think that she would come to harm. She might reach a stage of efflorescence in the somewhat torrid atmosphere rather sooner than she would otherwise have done. But if she liked to blossom exotically, well where was the harm? The phase was unlikely to last long, and the plant would not be injured by it. But Lucy! Ah! she was different. Her sweet pure wild flower petals would soon fade in such air. That they would ever become spotted he knew was impossible.

Jack, remembering his wife's insane longing for social elevation, was not so sure that she would be able to keep her footing on a slippery pathway. He grunted.

"Tell you what, old man," he said, after a moment's hesitation. "I wish you'd be with 'em here as much as you can. I know it is infernal cheek to ask you to bother yourself about a parcel of women. But d'you know, I believe she'd pay more attention to you than she would to me. She'd tell me I didn't understand. But she couldn't think that of you, since you are an old friend of the Horrexes."

Roger's heart leapt with pleasure. Nothing could have pleased him more. He had wondered what excuse he could make for thrusting his presence on Mabel so as to see as much of Lucy as he desired. And now he was actually requested to do the very thing for which he longed.

"If you don't think she'll mind——"

"Mind? My dear boy, you are a man and a major, aren't you? And you belong to a county family with plenty of dollars! She'll be only too delighted."

He spoke rather bitterly.

"But how can I excuse myself for constantly coming here? If she thinks I'm a spy on her, the fat will be in the fire."

"Oh, I'll tell her you are lonely. Or—yes, you won't mind, will you? I'll tell her you are keen on Luce."

He looked at his friend a little mischievously.

Roger flushed. "You'll only be telling the truth, Jack. I don't mind owning that I've never met a girl I liked so well as I like your sister-in-law. But what's the good ? She won't look at me."

Lucy had succeeded in persuading him that she thought very little of him, perhaps better than she wished. He was not experienced in the ways of women. Burnside could have told him that the lady's petulance on the previous evening was a hopeful sign.

Jack grinned. " Don't you believe it, my boy," he said. " Lucy's just the sort of girl to appreciate your points. She is quite different from my wife. Doesn't care a rap for society and all that tosh. She admires a man, a straightforward man with no humbug, not a philandering popinjay like that young ass, Lieutenant Carstairs, Mrs. Horrex seemed so keen on at dinner the other night. Then you'll do as I wish old man ? I'll tell Mabel that you are lonely here. You've had your turn at Cockleview, and don't care to be always hanging round there now. See ? How will that do ? "

The sound of voices interrupted the men, and Sara called out " Brine ! Brine ! Are you ready ? "

She entered the dining-room dressed ready for the fray.

" P'raps we shall meet you in the tahn," she said. " If not, we'll be back to lunch. I don't s'pose we can ketch a trine this mornin'."

Brian strolled in, pipe in mouth and swinging his gold braided cap in his hand. " I'll bring home a bit o' salmon if I see a fish," he said. " Seems to be the best thing there is in this place."

" Please do not unless you mean to take it with you," said Jack, sharply. " I do wish you would remember that you are guests, not boarders."

" Thank you," snorted Sara. " Strikes me as we shouldn't hev' come off up to much if Brine hadn't set you up with some victuals. I ain't seen much in the 'ouse but what 'e sent." She sniffed.

"Now, mammy, you shouldn't say things like that," protested Brian. "I'm sure Captain Jack has done everything he could. Don't pay no regard to her, please, Jack," he pleaded. "She don't mean half she says."

"Well," said the incorrigible Sara, "all I 'ope is, as 'e or Luce 'ere will bring somethin' 'ome for lunch. I don't want to go fastin' if you do."

She flounced out of the room, leaving her husband to follow rather sheepishly after her.

And presently Jack, Roger, Lucy and Beatie made their way out and down the town. Jack had the discretion to keep Beatie by his side and to leave Lucy to Roger.

They had not left the house ten minutes, when Perryman drove Mabel up to the house in a car.

He refused Mabel's invitation to enter. There was a curious mixture of expressions on his mobile face. If there was a mischievous twinkle in his eye, there was also a look of regretful wonder. He had, all the way down from Cockleview, kept looking at his companion as though he were endeavouring to ascertain her thoughts.

Mabel was not herself. Her eyes were dark and lustreless. Her lips tremulous. She seemed reluctant to meet Perryman's gaze.

While her air of languor was even greater than usual, she yet was tense with nervousness. She gave an impression of having endured a shock of some kind. When she raised her eyelids the pupils of her eyes were restless. Her air of discomposure had been observed at the breakfast table. "Why Mabel," said Adoline Horrex, "you look as if you'd had a white night. Didn't you sleep?"

"Perhaps she couldn't sleep apart fom hubby," sneered Burnside.

Until the Colonel spoke, Adoline had looked at him once or twice angrily. But his sneer seemed to reassure her. He certainly seemed displeased about something and less devoted to Mabel than he had been when he said good-night to her, with a smile. As it happened, his room was in the same corridor as hers.

At his sneer Mabel flushed, and then looked at him. Adoline watched that look, and thought she saw reproach and yet appeal in it. What had happened? At all events not what she had at first feared, or the man would not have been so brutal in his jibe.

"Would you like a pick me up, a pint of Pommery ?" asked Adoline, as though there were nothing out of the way in suggesting such a potion at breakfast. "No ? Then you shall have it at lunch."

"Oh, I can't stay for lunch," cried Mabel, with more energy than was usual with her. "I must go home this morning, please."

"I'll drive you down," said Burnside.

"Oh, no." She spoke as if she were frightened, and shrank back in her chair, so that her lean slim shape looked like a boneless wisp of clothing rather than the figure of the mother of a child of twelve.

"I *can* drive her down, can't I, Adoline ?" asked the Colonel.

"Haven't I told you not to call me by my Christian name ?" said Adoline, crossly. Her husband was not present. He always breakfasted in his room.

"Lord, yes, dozens of times. But you never meant it you know," said Burnside smiling, and stroking his moustache, which was not of the toothbrush order. "And anyway, that's not a reply to my request. I said I *can* drive her down in one of the cars, can't I ?"

"I—I'd rather walk," said Mabel, looking all round her as if for means of escape.

"Walk? Nonsense. If you won't trust Percy's driving, and he can't drive for nuts, Lance Perryman shall take you. You don't mind him?"

"Oh, no," Mabel said eagerly. So eagerly that she raised a laugh at her expense.

"So you're the favoured man this mornin', Lance," drawled Burnside. "Wish you luck, my son."

Again Mabel looked at the Colonel with reproach and appeal in her eyes. But he met her look frankly, and stared her out of countenance. She was less able to endure his gaze than she had been on the day previous.

After breakfast, while the Colonel obviously tried to get Mabel alone, she as obviously did her best to avoid him. At last he succeeded in catching her on the great upper terrace, which stretched along in front of the house, and from whence a magnificent view of Raincombe Ness and the Channel could be enjoyed.

"You're not really cross, are you?" he murmured.

"Oh! I don't know. You ought not to have come. You know you ought not. I—I am shaking still with terror."

"Do you mean that you did not expect me?"

"How can you say that? Did I behave as if I expected you? You are horrid this morning. I don't think I've deserved that."

"Well, I do." Then his voice softened. "Mabel," he murmured, "you will forgive me, won't you? After all there is little enough, too little, to forgive."

"Oh, please, do not ask me now. Please, do not. Do you wish to make me cry?"

"'Pon my word I'm deuced near doing it myself," he said. But the sardonic grin on his face contradicted his words.

Mabel lifted her eyelids and took a look at him.

"Can't you see the tears in my eyes?" he asked.

"I can see that you are very unkind. And—and I liked you so much."

The Colonel's expression softened. He was very skilful in winning his way with a woman.

"Thank God," he murmured. "Mabel, don't you like me still? I don't like you. Like is not the word."

"Please leave me now," pleaded the woman. "No," she flared up suddenly, with a fine indignation which was the more effective by reason of its contrast with her usual lethargic bearing. "I don't like you any longer. I hate you. I hate you."

"Well that's better than tolerating me anyway," said the Colonel, with a whimsical twist of the lips. "Now be good, and show you forgive me by letting me drive you down home."

"I couldn't. I couldn't. How could I see you meet my husband,—so soon."

"Oh, damn your husband," cried Burnside. "Tell me really, Mabel, would you rather I did not, or is it all pose?"

"It is not pose!" cried the woman, stamping her large feet. "How dare you say it is pose?"

"Very well," he replied with bland *insouciance*. "It is not pose. I won't press you further."

He performed an elaborate bow, and turned on his heel. He stalked off with sulkiness showing in every line of his back.

She looked after him a little wistfully. But she did not call him back.

When Lance Perryman brought round the car to the front of the house, Adoline was upstairs. At the sound of his honking, she ran down and caught Mabel issuing from her room. Adoline drew her back within it. "What's wrong, dear?" she asked. "You can trust me, you know. I don't blab. I'm not a puritan, and it takes a good deal to shock me. But there are certain things I bar. I think you have got to understand me and my little ways by this time. So tell me right out what's wrong."

"Oh, nothing," replied Mabel, unable to meet the sympathetic and quite honest eyes of her hostess. "You have been all that is kind. I—I have enjoyed myself immensely."

"Well, don't talk as if you were a Tooting lady at a tea party. You're not departing to the ends of the earth. We shall soon see each other again. Whenever you'd care for a motor spin, or feel an inward yearning for a chat, my dear, phone up and I'll send one of my boys down for you with a car. Percy Burnside or someone."

She watched her guest's face, especially her eyes and lips, as she spoke, and saw a dull flush darken Mabel's normally dead white complexion.

"Tell me, dear," urged Adoline, really solicitously, "ought I to give Percy the order of the *chaussure*? You know I always suspected that he was less trustworthy than my other male playmates. He's very charming though, in spite of the fact that I've got tired of his fascinations. But he knows what I allow and what I don't, well enough. I had to teach him that myself. If he has gone beyond the line of limitation——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" said Mabel, with a catch in her voice. "I—I don't quite understand. What right have I to say whether you ought to send him away?"

"Don't be a little humbug." Adoline's voice was a little scornful. "I've just said that you know me and my little ways pretty well by this time, and you can guess well enough what I allow my guests to do and what I don't.

"Mind you, if you let him get out of hand I should not blame you. After all, our ways are strange to you, and he knew it. You may not be so well able to take care of yourself as those of us who are used to it."

"I think I can do that," replied Mabel, blushing again. "And, please, I don't want to be a humbug."

"Very well. Then you won't mind meeting Percy as usual?"

Again the dull flush warmed Mabel's face. She shivered and rested her hand upon the brass knob of her bedstead. Adoline watched her closely and anxiously. As she said, there were some things she "barred," and if she found that Burnside had been guilty of one, he would get his walking papers without delay or compunction. As she had herself admitted, Bobbie Carstairs had put the Colonel's nose out of joint so far as she was concerned. Still, she still liked the man and enjoyed his artistic love-making.

"He wouldn't have tried it on with me," she was thinking. "But he may have taken advantage of her newness to our life, and her obvious delight in making one of us. If so, it is good-bye to master Percy."

At last Mabel forced herself to say. "Of course not. What makes you think that I should?"

"Now, now! Have I not told you that you may trust me, dear? You are obviously afraid to let him drive you home. But there—I think I understand, and I'm glad it is no worse."

At this Mabel smiled. "You are very good to me," she said. "And really, after to-day, I shan't mind meeting him."

"You little wretch," cried Adoline, who was about four inches shorter than the other, "I believe you wish to meet him again."

Somehow Mabel had gathered courage from her friend, and at the last shrewd hit—for she admitted to herself that it was a hit—she frankly burst out into a tremulous titter.

"I don't feel like that now quite," she said. "But as I've promised to be frank, I daresay I shall to-morrow."

Adoline put her arms round the other and kissed her. "That's right," she said. "And remember, that while we amuse ourselves up here we don't take things too seriously. All the leg pulling and chaffing that goes on may not be in the best taste. But it is amusing, and goodness knows we want something to amuse us in these dreary times! Now listen to a wise woman, wise by experience, my dear, and I don't deny it. Never let a man become so much to you that he can make you suffer. There is not one in a hundred who is worth it. And I know that Percy is not."

"I won't. I promise you that."

"We shall very likely go to the tennis club again to-morrow. Someone shall call for you on the way down if I don't see you before then. D'you know, I was quite worried about you this morning? You have relieved my mind a good deal. Now run along, dear. I must interview my housekeeper this morning. We've got a whole crowd of people coming to dinner to-night from Lyemouth and Mooredge, and my housekeeper is the giddiest fool to arrange anything more than lunch for half a dozen."

She kissed Mabel and ran off lightly.

In a few minutes Mabel was being driven on her way home. Burnside opened the door of the car for her, and helped her in with all the devotion which he had temporarily abandoned during their previous interview upon the terrace. As he took her hand to say good-bye, he whispered. "Have you forgiven me, Mabel?" And the woman, with lowered eyes, gave him one swift glance and murmured, "Yes."

What had happened to cause the trouble between those two was and is known only to them. And if Adoline made a shrewd guess, she kept her counsel and discouraged conversation which turned upon the matter at lunch time, when two or three of the men present began to chaff Burnside on Mabel's refusal to permit him to drive her home.

CHAPTER XVIII

TOMPKINS THE DEVOUT LOVER

WITHOUT troubling to go up to her room, Mabel made her way to the boudoir. For the moment she had forgotten that her husband had used it as his smoking room since his return, and she sniffed as she caught the scent of Brian's strong ship's tobacco, which he had smoked there that morning. Wearily she threw herself on the couch and rested her head on the cushions. She took off her hat, and threw it on the table. Then she loosened her bodice round her neck, and swept her hair from her eyes.

She sighed deeply, and fell into a muse.

There was constant play about her features as she sat thinking, play which indicated every phase of emotion, which seemed to traverse the entire gamut of feeling. At last her eyessoftened, but with a brightness which they rarely showed. Her lips widened to a delicious smile.

"Perhaps," she murmured to herself, "it was partly my fault. If—if he loves me so I ought to forgive him. It is nice to be loved, and I have no intention of sacrificing myself for him."

No. She was a woman to take all and give nothing. There are many such, and most of them succeed beyond their desert, provided that they are good to look at and can dissemble sufficiently to make their victims believe that they possess not only beauty and charm but feeling.

She had arrived at this comfortable stage when she heard the sound of footsteps outside the open window, and, looking up, saw the tall lean frame of Timothy Tompkins. He stood for a moment at the window, looking in, wearing the leer which he fondly believed to be his most captivating smile.

In his hands he bore a large bunch of roses, and a basket containing about four pounds of limp scarlet runners.

The difference between him and Percy Burnside struck Mabel as it had never struck her before. From what a pitiable condition had Adoline Horrex rescued her? And for that rescue she was indirectly indebted to her husband. She thought of him with compassionate toleration. Already she felt herself so much of the *grande dame* that she pitied Jack for being unable to enter into the life which had opened for her with the same pleasure and ease as she enjoyed. As for Tompkins, how could she ever have associated with the man!

"Thank God," said Tompkins, "I've found you alone at last! But first let me give you these. They are the best blooms in my garden and that is to say in Cocklemouth, and they—er—er—could not be bestowed upon—er anyone who—er —could so much adorn them."

He had thought out this little speech on his way down, and flattered himself it was a very telling one.

Mabel extended her hand with lazy carelessness. "Thanks so much," she drawled. "How kind of you, Mr. Tompkins." Even at that moment, when she saw the man in his native uncouthness, she remembered that the beans in the basket were worth quite a shilling, and would save her housekeeping money to that extent. "And are those for me too?" she asked, with a smile.

"Yes. I wish they were more worthy to bring you," said Tompkins, seating himself on a chair close to the head of the couch on which Mabel was reclining.

"No," said the man, as she stretched her hand out to the bell button, which was near the couch, "don't ring yet, please. I—I have something to say."

He had braced himself up to declare his passion. He had such a belief in his personal fascinations that he did not wait to think that he might appear to Mabel at a disadvantage now that she had only just returned from the society of her new friends. And he was hungry to take vengeance on Jack for the snubs he had endured, and to reassure himself that Mabel regarded him with affection.

"Yes ?" she said, without suspicion of what was coming.

Tompkins had not been able to hint at his love in the delicious way which had been easy to Percy Burnside. Hitherto he had been too nervous to show it openly, and he was not skilled in suggestion. But, of course, she knew of it.

"I think," he said, with an appalling leer, "that you must know how it is with me."

Mabel had heard through Gladys of the stories the man had put about concerning himself, of his imaginary ill-health, and she supposed that he was referring to that.

"No, no," he said. "It is not that, Mabel——"

She raised her eyebrows. But after all it was not the first time he had called her by her Christian name when they were alone. She remembered with more justice than she often exhibited, that for a long time he had been almost her only friend in Cocklemouth. But she began to wonder what was coming, or rather to have a suspicion that Tompkins meant to come to the point now with a vengeance. She was, however, unable to realise how different his declaration would seem to her now from what it would have seemed before Jack came home, or rather before her introduction to and subsequent familiarity with the people up at Cockleview. She felt a resentment rising which was really unfair to poor Tompkins.

"Mabel, I have been so unhappy."

His loose mouth drooped, his eyes were reddened with emotion, his voice was thick, and his manner extremely uneasy.

"I'm sorry," she said, suppressing an inclination to smile. "I hope it is not very serious."

"It is because of you—you! You seem to have got away from me. You are always up at Cockleview now, and I feel sure that those people will do their best to make you forget me."

This was really going beyond a joke. Still, if he stopped there, there was no sense in taking offence.

"I assure you," she said, "that they never mention your name. To tell you the truth, I doubt if they know of your existence."

Tompkins flushed. "Thet's it," he said. "Thet's it! Up there you forget me. And I—I can't forget you."

It must come now. He rose to his feet, feeling that he would be able to impress her better from an upright position, or as nearly upright has he could force his shoulders and bent back to appear.

"Why!" she cried, laughing. "I've only been away a night."

"And your husband, he doesn't seem to like me."

He stopped short here, and bit his lips. This whining attitude would never, never do.

"Oh, you must not mind Jack. It is his manner. I have told him how kind you have been to me."

"I have, haven't I. I know I have tried to be. I could not help it. Mabel, you know, don't you? You must know. I love you, my darling, I adore you. Tell me it is not hopeless. Tell me you love me a little in return and that I may hope and——"

He flung himself on his knees at her feet and snatched her hand, which she wrenched away immediately.

"Really," she said, sitting up on the couch, and biting her lips. The man was so absurd! Ah! Percy Burnside was never absurd in his lovemaking, whatever else he might be!

Before she could remonstrate further, Tompkins had flung himself forward, still on his knees, and reaching out his long simian arms had caught her round her waist.

"No, no," she cried, wrestling with him. "Are you mad?"

She struggled fiercely. But though he was a weakling for a man so was she for a woman. He was now beside himself, roused to something more resembling a man, or at least a male animal, than ever before in his life. If he could not be an Englishman at the extremest height of his passion, he managed to be something like a German. His blood, watery stuff as it was, was boiling in his veins, his temples throbbed, and his breath came panting in swift gusts.

In vain she called to him to release her. He hardly heard her. He held her waist with his left hand and took her chin in his right hand, forcing her mouth up. Then, with a gasp of attainment, he forced his lips to hers, and held her breathless till he must needs cease to kiss her in order to breathe.

In the midst of her degradation, as it seemed to her, she never quite lost her discretion. To scream might bring Gladys on the scene, and that would result in a scandal which would be elaborated and enjoyed all over the town. If it were possible for her to save herself from further insult without calling for assistance, she would do it. Had she known how to pray, she would have prayed that she might succeed in this.

The man was now still less responsible. The touch of her lips had sent the blood rushing to his head. He was a sight at which to sicken. His thin lips curled back and exposed his teeth, his little eyes were red and blazed with a glare that resembled nothing sane. His jaw thrust out, and worked as though he were chewing. She could feel his arms twitching. She began to fear lest he was beyond her control, and she might be compelled to call out.

But, as he again tried to force her lips up to his, fury seized her, and her limbs and muscles, normally so lax, became taut and nervous, full of a strength which more than matched his own insane power.

She dashed her right hand in his face and thrust him back, and, as he barely saved himself from falling over, she sprang to her feet, her eyes ablaze, her whole body quivering. That he, this wretch of a man, should have touched her lips! All the offence, whatever it was, of which Burnside had been guilty, was forgotten, and the woman's heart only remembered how handsome he was, how delightfully he had wooed her, the artistry with which he had made love to her. Even so sensual an influence as Burnside's scented moustache occurred to her as she caught a whiff of Tompkins's hair oil and breath. Ugh! She felt unclean.

"Go," she said. "I think you must be mad, or drunk. What have I ever done that you should insult me in this way? Oh go, or I shall tell my husband of this disgraceful affair. I hope you *are* drunk, and will apologise to me when you have come to your senses. That you, YOU should dare to touch me! To kiss me! Ugh! How could you dare?"

She penetrated his hide. He could not blind himself to the sincerity of the repulsion she felt for him. It killed his passion for the moment, to replace it by another, that of rage. Now he longed feverishly for vengeance both on her and on Jack.

Being a cad, he behaved like a cad.

"What 'ave you done?" he repeated her words, and dropped an aspirate in his fury, "oh, nothing! I suppose you never encouraged me, never looked soft at me, never took what I brought! I suppose you never said how grateful you were to me, never heard me call you Mabel before! Oh, no! D'you think I don't know what it is! It's the orficers who have turned your head. I ain't good enough for you now. Oh, no! Timothy Tompkins—what are you laughin' at?"

For the name came so trippingly off his tongue, and sounded so ridiculous in a melodramatic situation, that stirred with anger as she was she could not restrain a laugh. She had no sense of humour, but sometimes ridiculous things amused her. Now she was wrought up to a condition near to hysteria, and her laugh began to grow convulsive and to be blended with the whoops and sobbing cries of an hysterical convulsion.

Without being aware of it, he took the best means for checking her. Had he shown her sympathy the hysteria would have increased. But his brutality brought her to herself.

"Laugh! Oh, you can laugh!" he said. "Wait till I tell people about your sister you're ashamed of, who drops her aitches and speaks cockney, she who's married to a merchant sailor, who——"

"Will you go?" said Mabel, panting, and shuddering, "or shall I ring for my maid?"

"Ring? You daren't. You know what people would say if they heard you had to call for help? Yah! You daren't ring. I'll see the whole town knows about your sister, you're ashamed of. I'll see the high and mighties up at Cockleview hear all about her. That'll soon put a stop to your games up there. Did you think I spent shilling after shilling on your impudent brat for nothing? I know your sort now. You're a teaser, that's what they call you. As for that hoity toity lot up at Cockleview, I wish 'em joy of you. Oh, I'm going," he said quickly, as he saw her reach out towards the bell. She did not mean to ring it, but to make him think she was about to do so.

Snarling and cursing he slinked out, snatching up the roses and basket of beans. "You shan't have them at all events," he said.

The childish stupidity of this wrought on Mabel. Within the last twelve hours she had undergone much, and she was not accustomed to nervous strain of any kind. Previously, she had used her utmost endeavours to protect her own comfort. Only for her child's sake had she sacrificed her own wishes, her own equanimity. And the failure of her social campaigns both at Herringhaven and at Cocklemouth, were probably the most serious disappointments with which she had met in her life.

Now while she was exulting in her new found social elevation, she was confronted with two dramatic situations, in each of which she had been the sufferer.

As has already been mentioned, what she had actually undergone at the hands of Percy Burnside is only known to herself and to him.

It had been sufficient to send her home frightened, unnerved, and to change her mindless lassitude, her lazy frivolity—for even in her gaiety she seemed half-hearted—to brooding fretfulness. Then on the top of this came Tompkins's madness.

"That you shan't," affirmed Tompkins, with a leer which represented a state of mind similar to that of a small boy who puts his tongue out, or makes, what the French call, a "*pied de nez*."

As he disappeared, Mabel began to titter. Her tittering rose to convulsive laughter, which soon broke into whoops and gurgles, and the shrill choking cries of hysteria.

Helplessly she abandoned herself and writhed on the couch, a prey to the nervous break-down which was only partly caused by Tompkins's ridiculous rudeness. She might have escaped the attack had he confined himself to the atrocious love scene. But in her excited condition, to her over sensitised nerves, the laughable pettiness of his last words was fatal.

And as there was no one present to check her roughly her attack developed, till her cries rang through the house.

She was gasping for breath and screaming at one and the same time when Gladys came running in, her eyes bulging out of her head.

"Oh, lor, mam, what's the matter?" asked Gladys.

"I—I shan't—hoo hoo hoo—have those at any rate, oho, oho, oho, chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, whoop, whoop, whoop," went Mabel.

"Do ha' done," urged Gladys, who had a neurotic sister, fortunately for her mistress.

"Did—did you hee-ee-eear!" shrieked Mabel, and off she went again whooping and screaming.

Gladys seized her by the shoulders and shook her heartily. "Ha' done," she said. "Doctor says you'll go crazy if you keep on at it."

Mabel tried to shake off her maid's grip, but Gladys held tight, and shook her again and again, till seeing that there was a carafe of water on the table, which she had omitted to clear away that morning, she took it and threw its contents in her mistress's face.

There was a gasp and a shudder, and Mabel collapsed silent at last. Then Gladys, seeing that she was safe for a time, ran upstairs and fetched down a bottle of ammoniated salts, which she held to Mabel's nostrils till the latter gave signs of revival.

When she came fully to her senses she was quite calm but felt dreadfully weak. She remembered all that had happened, and the only thing for which she now longed was peace and privacy.

For once she was sensible and grateful for her maid's ministrations, and recognised that the girl's roughness had been beneficial to her. Quietly but irresistibly the shocks she had endured were working for her good and gradually acting on her nature like some chemical solvent.

"Thank you," she said to Gladys, who regarded her with some surprise. The girl had expected to be severely reprimanded. In spite of her tendency towards dalliance with young male visitors, and to her vanity and abhorrence of work, there were courage and sense in her.

She was no fool in her treatment or thoughts of the concerns of anyone but of herself.

"Lor', mam," she said, to enable her mistress to recover herself further, "you give me quite a turn! That's lucky as I've a sister who is took so now and again. Sorry if I wetted you mam. I don't think I've hurt your blouse. Can I get you anything, mam?"

The stress of the morning was developing praiseworthy qualities in both mistress and maid. Each observed it in the other, and each wondered with some admiration.

"Is my bed made?" asked Mabel. "I think I will go up and lie down if it is."

"You can't do no better," agreed Gladys, dropping the "mam" now that Mabel no longer needed succour. "And if I was you I'd have a nice hot cup o' tea."

Mabel rose to her feet and found that she was a little unsteady. Gladys observed this and approached her. "Put yer 'and on my shoulder," she said, "and I'll 'elp you up."

Once up in her bedroom, Mabel experienced a longing for the smooth cool feel of sheets about her. "I think I'll get quite into bed," she said, "and then I shall be grateful if you'll bring me up some tea."

"Grateful! What next?" thought Gladys. "I 'ope she ain't took the inerferlenza nor nothin'. She's different some 'ow!" But she said aloud. "You can't do no better. Can you manage by yourself while I go down and make the tea?"

"Oh, yes, thank you." (Again Gladys looked at her with surprise.) "And Gladys——"

"Yes?"

"If your master comes home you need not say——"

"No. Cert'ny not. I'll tell 'im you're that tired you 'ad to 'ave a lie down. I s'pose you don't want 'im up just yet?"

"No. But if Miss Lucy comes home she may come up."

"Cert'ny," said the girl, and left the room.

A longing to hear Lucy's sweet fresh voice, to see her pure honest eyes, had come over Mabel. Her neurotic attack seemed to have cleansed her bosom of "certain perilous stuff." She no longer dallied with the notion of resuming her love play with Burnside. Tompkins had sickened her of illicit love, had shown her to what all such love as could be offered to her by any man other than her husband really amounted in its crude unveneered form.

She undressed herself quickly and stretched herself between the sheets with a sigh of content.

She drank the tea which Gladys brought her while the girl remained in the room, and when she had emptied her cup she let her head sink back on the pillows and closed her eyes. She was truly very tired.

"I'll just darken the room a mite," said Gladys, going to the window and lowering the blind. "You'll ring if you want anything."

Hearing her mistress assent in a very drowsy voice she nodded thoughtfully, and tiptoed out of the room.

Soon Mabel was fast asleep.

In a way "*elle dormait sur la roue.*"

CHAPTER XIX

THREE'S NONE

THE little party consisting of Jack, Roger, Lucy and Beatie must just have missed the car bearing Lance Perryman and Mabel to Lambyre Road. They strode along down the town chatting together till they came to Samuel's fish shop on Church Hill, at which Lucy stopped.

"I had better get something in for lunch, Jack," she said. "Hadn't I?"

"No, no," said Jack. "Leave that to me. You go on with Roger. Beatie and I will do the shopping this morning. We'll find you on the front somewhere. Beatie will teach me how to shop."

Lucy still hesitated. She was a little afraid of being left alone with Roger. Not that she feared him, but feared her own heart. She had that morning told herself again that she must not let herself love this man whom she could so easily love. He was so far above her in station, that only unhappiness could come of such a love. Even if he had serious intentions, "and, of course, he only means to be polite you little fool" could happiness come from a marriage between people of different rank? She had seen the result of her sister's marriage with Jack, and had often pitied Jack. People should never have to pity Roger for a similar cause if she could help it. The recent appearance of the Teagues strengthened her in this view. And she hardened her heart to the love which was whispering there, insinuatingly.

Roger saw her hesitation, and dealt with it in a prompt military way. "All right, old chap," he replied to Jack. "Come along, Miss Lightfoot. He'll be shy if we watch him, and we shan't have anything to eat for lunch."

He was so "jolly," so obviously without any nefarious designs upon her heart, and it was so pleasant to be with him that—well, how could a girl resist him when he took everything for granted ?

She did not see the wink which Jack gave his brother officer, but the latter did, and looked rather cross at the sight of his friend going off grinning.

Roger was wise and wary. He saw that his best policy was to play the friendship game for all it was worth, but to play it in such a way as to suggest that he did not consider her any ordinary friend.

He remembered that she had an appointment with Lance Perryman on the front, and wondered whether she would expect him to leave her with Lance. He wouldn't. Hanged if he would. Lance was all right in his way, a good funny sort of ass. But why did he want to shove his nose in where he was not wanted. The idea that he, though he was an earl's son, could be worthy to occupy the time of a girl like Lucy was preposterous !

"Which way shall we go ?" he asked. "Down the Strand or past the post office ?"

Lucy looked at him doubtfully. "Are you making fun of me, Major Upton ?" she asked. "The Strand is in London, is it not ? I believe you are laughing at me for being a country bumpkin."

"I'll swear I'm not," cried Roger, shocked that she should imagine him capable of making fun of her in so asinine a way. "They seem to call any place the Strand down here, if it is anywhere near the water. There is a Strand over at Raincombe. In fact, the Strand and Fore Street seem to be the favourite names in this part of the world. You'll find 'em at Lyemouth and nearly everywhere."

"I'm sorry," she said, drooping her eyelids. "I don't mind which way you go. But you know I have promised to meet Captain Perryman on the front about this time. I think we had better go the shortest way."

"Oh, you know——" Roger began to protest. But he remembered how his previous criticism of her appointment had been received, so he changed what he was going to say to, "it doesn't make five yards difference which way you go."

"Then let's go 'down the Strand,'" laughed Lucy. "The boys at Herringhaven, my home, used to sing a song about 'down the Strand.'"

They were now passing through a very narrow little alley which led from Church Hill to the High Street, and which was so narrow that two carts could not pass each other in it, when they heard the squeal of an electric siren behind them, and Roger drew his companion on to the path which rang along one side of the roadway. She was only just safe on the pavement, when Lance Perryman came scooting down the alley considerably faster than was safe for the public. He had, however, slowed when he entered the narrowest part so that Roger was able to hit him on the arm with his stick. "You ass, Lance" he shouted. "Don't you see you had a narrow escape of running down Miss Lightfoot."

The expression of dismay on the comedian's face was ludicrous. He had been so immersed in watching the road ahead that he had not recognised the girl whom he was hurrying to meet.

"Oh, I say," he cried, slowing the car to a crawl. "I'm most awf'ly sorry, Miss Lightfoot."

"You are not fit to be trusted with a car," said Roger, very angry, and not displeased at having the opportunity of taking it out of Lance in the presence of the beloved one.

"Well, it is her fault as much as mine," said the unrepentant misdoer. "I was in such a hurry to meet her that the car understood and bucked up without my using the accelerator. 'Pon my word it did. A car has just as much sympathy with a chap as a horse you know, Miss Lightfoot, and this one gets quite sentimental sometimes."

"Not when you are driving it I should think, Captain Perryman," laughed the girl.

"Oh, I say! How unkind you are this morning. What have you been doing, Upton? You should not let him influence you, Miss Lightfoot. I know he is very trying sometimes, and makes me feel just like that."

"It is not fair to accuse Major Upton," said Lucy, rather hotly.

Roger's heart leapt, and Lance felt a corresponding depression.

"Oh, well, I know he affects *me* like that," said the latter. "I only spoke for myself y' know. And I always say what I mean. I'm not a liar or a humbug. Upton will admit that"

"Yes," said Roger, grinning. "I will."

By this time the car and the pedestrians had reached the four cross ways made by the narrow alley, the Strand, the High Street, and Cockle Street. Lance drew round to the left, into the High Street, and stopped the car. "Won't you get in?" he asked. "And we'll go for a spin along the esplanade. It's the best way of seeing the front y' know. More comfy than the old seats and shelters, and it's too hot to walk."

"You lazy beast," said Roger, disdainfully. "Miss Lightfoot is not afraid of walking a hundred yards or so."

"How d'you know, Tommy? You take a great deal on yourself, don't you, Tommy, speaking for the lidy! I didn't 'ear 'er harsk yer to hinterpret for 'er!"

His assumption of the cockney accent reminded Lucy and Roger of Sara, and, for a moment, their thoughts were drawn to the Teagues, and they wondered what they would do that day. Their eyes met and they burst out laughing. Lance, delighted by the belief that his simple and crude humour had caused their laughter, was stimulated to further efforts.

"Step hin lidy," he said. "All fares free ter dye. Tike ye on the hesplinide for nuffink! 'Ere yer hare!"

He spang from his driver's seat and opened the front door of the car, disobeying the King's regulations by removing his cap, for he was in uniform.

Lucy looked at Roger, and saw how sulky he was. She smiled as she told Lance to take the driver's seat first as otherwise he would have to perform one of his acrobatic feats to reach his place after her entry—a performance she had once witnessed when he had driven Mabel from her house, and which she thought would be rather too startling for the sedate Cocklemouth public.

At that hour the natives of the place were busy shopping, and the streets were full of them, while the visitors were mostly on the front, on the sands, or bathing. The sight of Lance Perryman turning a somersault over the wheel before the eyes of those dowdy, prim and intolerant old frumps, both male and female, would be sufficient to upset their flaccid intellects for a week.

"Right oh," said Lance, obeying her.

Roger hurried forward and helped her into the car.

"I assuah you my deeah fellah," said Lance, with a broad grin, "that Miss Lightfoot is not afraid of getting into the car by herself, ah!"

"Oh, you dry up," snapped Roger, who, having seen Lucy comfortably established, proceeded to open the door of the tonneau, and to ensconce himself within the latter.

"Here, I say," cried Lance. "Two's company and three is none. I didn't bring the car down to drive you about, my beauty. ''Op it' as our friends, the Tommies in sunny France, say to brother Fritz. ''Op it, you blighter.'"

"Can't be did," said Roger. "Jack Greenfield has entrusted the lady to my charge, and I should not feel justified in delegating my responsibility to an irresponsible cuckoo like you."

"Major Upton!" cried Lucy, in mock indignation.

"Very well then," said Lance. "You may ride behind but you must not speak nor listen to our conversation. Think you are a manservant, or a maidservant if you like. Only remember your proper place."

Before Roger could retort, Lance slipped in the clutch and the car purred off. A turn to the right at right-angles brought him past the post office, and a little further on he swept on to the little esplanade.

He drove round till he reached the straight run along the sea wall, steered to the pier, and brought up. "Now," he said to Lucy. "Just look at 'em? See the dif. between this crowd and the oysters?"

"Oysters?" asked Lucy innocently.

"Natives, my dear lady. Natives, in their raddled shells! But oysters are soft and luscious inside, and these are not."

Lucy laughed. "It would not be so bad if they were not so depressing," she said. "But really——"

"'Scuse me. I know what you'd like to say and don't dare. You mean they give you the blinkin' hump. Now don't you?"

"Lance, unless you can speak properly, I shall remove my charge from your contaminating proximity," said Roger, from astern.

"That'll do, me man. Don't speak unless you are spoken to," said Lance. Then he turned to Lucy. "Having now brought you to the proper state of mind," he said, "I will proceed to read you my beeyootiful poem on the place and its people."

"Oh help," came from the rear.

"Another word like that and consider yourself discharged," warned Lance. "No humbug, my son. Just you listen, learn by heart, and inwardly digest. It'll do your coarse mind good. Er—hum."

"ODE TO COCKLEMOUTH."

"What, already ?" cried Roger. "I didn't know the people at the asylum let you out enough to enable you to get into debt."

Lance wrinkled his mobile comedian's face into such contortions of disgust that Lucy broke into a laugh. "Oh, go on Captain Perryman," she said. "I want to hear the poetry."

"D'ye hear, you beyind," said Lance, to Roger. "The lidy wants to listen, so shut yer silly trap.

ODE TO COCKLEMOUTH.

Fresh from where the cannons roar,
Home I came to Britain's shore
To spend a happy leave in song and dance.
But when I saw the face,
Which is native to this place,
I decided it was better there in France.

The expressions make you jump,
Till you fairly get the hump,
And the manners are as rude as rude can be.
You may bet your merry bobs,
That a bigger lot of snobs
Never lived within a hamlet by the sea.

They are ignorant and pert,
And they'd gladly lick the dirt
From the boots of any ill-bred millionaire.
Though they swank of pedigrees,
They begrudge the bread and cheese,
Upon which their high and mightinesses fare.

If you heard 'em talk you'd think,
That champagne's their daily drink,
When in truth they hardly run to Plymouth gin.
They're illiterate, conceited,
If you deal with them you're cheated,
If you trust them they are sure to do you in.

They're impertinent, thick hided,
Their ideas are all lop-sided,
They're behind the times, unhealthy, and unclean.
And I'll swear if Cocklemouth
Is a sample of the South,
That I'm satisfied with all the South I've seen!

"But it isn't the South you ass," broke in Roger. "It is the South-West, and Cocklemouth is not at all typical of the county. That is one of the strangest things about the place and the people, Miss Lightfoot," he continued, turning to Lucy. "Within a few miles, on the moor and round about, you'll find as lovely a place, as bracing air, and as civil, honest and delightful a people as can be found in all England. Cocklemouth is quite by itself, and, I daresay, prides itself upon being so."

"Then God enlighten the blighters," said Lance.

"Anyway they are good enough for you, Lamprey," said Roger. "And how you can waste the time, even of a footling idiot like you, in writing such utter tosh, beats me!"

"Well, there's gratitude for an intellectual treat," protested Lance, with a humorous look of appeal to Lucy.

"I think they are capital, Captain Perryman," said the girl. "But, perhaps, I ought not to say so, for I have seen very little of the people as yet."

"Then take my tip, my dear lady," advised Lance, solemnly. "Keep it like that. The less you see of 'em the better you'll like 'em."

"Have you been turned down by a local beauty, or snuffed by a local knut by any chance, Lamprey?" asked Roger.

"Local knut, my dear chap! Well, I always said you were a tile loose. But we demean ourselves by talking with our man, Miss Lightfoot," he added, turning to the girl. "Now, having got my lovely lyric off my chest, I am ready to obey your commands. Whither would you like me to drive you? And before I forget it, can you tell me of a rhyme for Lucy? I sat up last night with a wet towel round my head, till Adoline Horrex threatened to give me the order of the boot, and the only thing I could think of was juicy. Now, at the time, I wasn't thirsty enough to get anything poetical out of that."

"You've got infernal cheek mentioning Miss Lightfoot's Christian name," cried Roger, really vexed lest Lucy should be annoyed. Of course, he knew that Lance did not mean any harm. There was not a grain of harm in the fellow. But Lucy might not be used to "rotting."

"You don't mind, do you?" pleaded Lance.

"Well, I think it is a pity you should waste your time in such a way," laughed Lucy. "Of course, if you had succeeded in writing me a poem as beautiful as that on Cocklemouth, I couldn't help considering it a compliment. As it is, I think I do mind a little."

She looked at him, and he knew that she considered that he had taken a liberty. His face fell ludicrously, and he looked so woe-begotten that the girl's good nature and spirits could not stand out against him. "Never mind," she said. "I'll forgive you."

"Then shall we go for a spin to Redrock Bay, or Spratbay?" asked Lance. "There's lots of time to go to either and be back for lunch. I suppose you would not lunch with us at Spratbay, would you?"

"I really cannot," replied the girl. "Can I, Major Upton?"

"Now don't ask that fool. Fancy asking the man behind, whom I took to do any repairs we might need——"

"He rarely goes out with a car without smashing her up, Miss Lightfoot," said Roger. "No wonder he wants someone to do the repairs."

"Ass. As if——" He was about to refer to his powers as an aviator, but thought that to do so might seem like "swanking." So he pulled himself up. "As if he'd be of any real use anyway," he concluded, with a silent word of self-congratulation that he had avoided the appearance of boasting. He was really a very good-hearted, good-natured, and pleasant young man, was this hero of the air, whose flying stunts were quoted throughout the R.A.F., and who might have claimed to be an "ace" four or five times over.

"I can't go anyhow," said Roger. "I've promised to lunch with Jack Greenfield."

"And, of course, I can't go," cried Lucy, as Lance, on hearing that Roger was unable to accompany him to Spratbay, began to press her still more eagerly to go with him. "I can't leave Jack to-day. He has to go up to town this afternoon."

"He won't mind," argued Lance. "Oh, do come. I don't mean you, you old spoil sport." He looked round at Roger. "But you, Miss Lightfoot. There is an aerodrome at Spratbay."

"Conceited ass," snorted Roger. "D'you think Miss Lightfoot has never seen a 'plane? Or are you under the fond impression you'd be permitted to go up and do stunts. 'Pon my word it would be a good thing if they did let you up, except that it would mean a lost plane, for you know Dr. Abbot—Moor told you——"

"Oh, shut up," shouted the infuriated aviator. And Lucy burst out into a peal of laughter. "You two are really ridiculous," she said.

"Nasty wet blanket sort of chap, isn't he, Miss Lightfoot?" asked Lance. "If I were you I'd give him the chuck, just to show your contempt for his whimpering."

"But I can't let Jack have lunch without some woman to help him. You know he has visitors."

She looked round at Roger, to see if he would enjoy her reference to the Teagues. He was smiling, but it was a sorry smile. He was not half so depressed as he thought he was. Lovers at his stage of the pyrexia take a delight in bemoaning their fate without cause, and often make themselves a weariness to themselves and to all about them. Roger was not so bad as that. But he was in the way of it.

And as Lucy looked at him, Lance broke out, "Ass that I am. Double distilled above proof extra sec ass!"

"I always said you were," commented Roger from astern.

"Idiot. I mean I'm an ass——"

"So do I."

"Shut up and let me speak. I ought to have told Miss Lightfoot that I'd driven her sister home. I ought to have told her as soon as I saw her, but the magic of her presence struck me dumb."

"I wish to God it had," said Roger, with great sincerity and heartiness.

"Oh, do leave off teasing each other," cried Lucy, rippling with laughter. Then she said seriously to Lance. "Do you mean you took my sister home before you met us?"

"Yes, yes, YES. That's what I ought to have told you at first, but that blighter put it out of my head."

"Thank you, Captain Perryman," cried Lucy. "That is the first time I have been called that."

"I didn't mean you. Good lord, you know I didn't," said Lance, smitten with a little of Roger's amorous imbecility.

"But you said it was the sight of me that made you forget it, and then you said it was 'that blighter.' So I must be the blighter."

"No. *I* am," said Lance.

"By George! He's got it at last!" cried Roger. "Oh, I say!"

"What's the matter? Hullo! Who's that old party waving her umbrella at us?"

He pointed in the direction which Roger was already looking, and Lucy, following the line he indicated, saw Sara and Brian in the distance, rolling along the esplanade like a Thames barge in regatta rig and a sturdy pilot's cutter.

Sara had recognised Lucy and Roger in the car. Now, she thought, was her time. No doubt the car came from Cockleview.

"Please, don't look," begged Lucy, though she was free of any taint of snobbishness. She dared not, for Mabel's sake, permit Sara to get in touch with Lance, and introduce herself as Mabel's sister. Roger did not matter. He had met her. She believed that Lance would have understood and conducted himself with sympathetic discretion. But she feared lest the woman should prove too much for his sense of humour. And if he started to make quiet fun of her it would be too much for her gravity. So she steadfastly kept her eyes turned from the approaching pair, and urged Lance to start the car.

"But I thought we were to wait on the front for

Jack," said Roger. "If we move, he and Beatie may miss us. Why don't you stick it out, Miss Lightfoot ?"

"Oh, I can't," cried Lucy. "They'll want us to take them up."

"Why not ?" asked Lance, with a broad grin. "Who are they ?"

"I'll tell you if you'll start. Oh, do make haste."

Seeing no signs of recognition from the car, Sara was hurrying and cavorting along waving her umbrella wildly in strenuous sweeps as though she were practising the broad sword exercise. Brian strode along sturdily, his chin projecting, his mouth set.

As Lucy really seemed anxious, Lance delayed no longer. But when he made up his mind to start he remembered that he had stopped the engine. And the couple was bearing down upon them with relentless speed.

"Upton, my son," he said. "Hop out and crank her like a man.'

He grinned at the thought that as soon as Roger had started the engine he would glide off and leave him behind. But Roger was aware of his kind intention, and no sooner did the first explosion roar out than he swung himself up behind, and Lance said, "Damn !" quite out loud.

"Oh, do make haste," urged Lucy again. "We shall pick up Jack in the town."

"The umbrella lady must be worth knowing though," said Lance. "I'd give the world to meet her."

He changed gear to the second speed and was able to glide off swiftly while the Teagues were still forty yards distant.

"Hi ! Hi !" shouted Sara. "Lucy ! Luceee ! Hi ! Hi ! Stop that 'ere car, mister ! Drive us 'ome, won't yer ?"

"It does seem a pity to leave it," protested Lance, looking at Lucy while he swung into the high street, and up Apple Gardens. “ Oh, here are Jack and Beatie.”

Jack, laden with a rush basket, and accompanied by Beatie, bearing a large box of chocolates, came to a standstill as they saw Lucy gesticulating.

The car had just swung round a corner, and, save by estimating the difference between the pace of which the Teagues were capable and that made by the car, it was impossible for the motorists to judge how far the former were behind them.

“ Hop in, Greenfield,” shouted Lance, putting on the brakes and stopping the car with a precipitancy prejudicial to the tyres. “ We're bein' chased.”

“ Yes. Come in, Jack,” cried Lucy. “ The Teagues may not be far behind. They saw us on the front, and the woman called to us and wanted to be taken up.”

“ Good lord,” said Jack. “ And I had forgotten them for the moment.”

Roger swung open the door behind, and Jack tossed Beatie in and then followed her, lumping the basket on the floor of the car.

“ Have you got everything you want ? ” asked Lucy. “ If not, we may have time to stop at the shops in Cutt Street.”

“ But why this haste ? ” asked Jack. “ You don't mean that they will make forcible entry, do you ? ”

“ No. But they—well, Jack, do you want Sara to meet Captain Perryman ? ”

“ Why should you put it on to poor me ? ” asked Lance. “ I'd love to meet 'em.”

“ Oh, no you wouldn't,” said Jack. “ If you once spoke to the woman, she'd pester your life out till you took her up to Cockleview and introduced her to Mrs. Horrex. Besides, if she learnt that you were the son of an earl, my dear chap, you'd never get rid of her.”

"He likes to be called his lordship. Didn't you know that, Jack," said Roger.

"Liar," said Lance. "Hallo! It's too late. Here they are!"

A taxi came honking round the corner, and in the cab Sara and Brian reclined, leaning back at an angle to show their familiarity with motor vehicles.

"Hi! stop driver!" shouted Sara, prodding the chauffeur in the back with the ferule of her umbrella.

On seeing Lance drive off from the esplanade, Sara had stopped and gasped. Cheered by a glance which Roger gave as the car got into its stride she waved a large handkerchief frantically, hoping against hope that this might stop the fugitives.

"I s'pose they didn't see us," she said, mournfully to her husband. "And I s'pose they couldn't 'ear me 'cos o' the engine. I don't think they saw us, not to know us, do you?"

"They ain't blind," said Brian, lowering. Had a slight been put upon his beloved mammy? If so, he'd soon see about it!

"Oof!" gasped Sara, using the handkerchief she had waved for the more legitimate if less refined purpose of swabbing her hot face. "Never mind, Brine. Now I've got them rooms right on the front they cawn't be horf seein' of me 'fore long."

Brian grunted. "We'll have a cab. A taxi. Do they think as they're the only ones as can motor about! We can do it as well as them. They ain't goin' to make us look small with their cars. I can have a motor-car as well as them. I've got a servant as well as them and newer furniter and bigger rooms, and there's nothin' they've got I can't have as good or better."

But Sara knew this to be untrue.

She turned round to look for a taxi. "Why, Brine!" she said, "'ere's Captain Cutwater!"

Cutwater was lumbering his bulk along with dainty steps which suggested gout. As usual he carried a large basket full of grocery in his right hand. He wore his Panama.

He did not appear overjoyed to meet the Teagues, but he did not refuse their extended hands. Probably the merchant skipper's uniform which Brian wore still overawed the retired purser.

He had witnessed the incident of the car, and was a little perplexed. He had not understood that the Teagues were unwelcome guests of the Greenfields.

"How de doo? How de doo?" he said. "Pity they didn't see ye. That young chap driving the car is the son of Lord Scratby, Earl of Scratby y' know. Charmin' young feller. You'd have liked to know him."

"There, Brine. Now it's too late."

"Oh," suggested Cutwater, who was quite willing to cut short his conversation on the Grand Esplanade with the somewhat conspicuous couple. "I dessay if you took a taxi you'd catch 'em up. Sure to have some shopping to do. The Honourable Lancelot Perryman probably came down to go to Farwell the grocer for Mrs. Horrex. You'll catch 'em up there."

"You'll escuse us then, Captain," said Sara.

Brian gave a flick of the hand, and Sara delivered her best bow so quickly that Cutwater had no time to mention any of his possessions. He bore this well, and was content to be rid of his interceptors.

The taxi-man started his engine at the sight of the Brian's signalling arm, and the Teagues hurried to the corner at which the car awaited them.

"Catch that green car as just drove past and it's 'arf a dollar over the fare, driver," gasped Sara, tumbling into the cab with such momentum that the springs protested.

Nerved with the knowledge that there was the son of a live lord to be known, it would take a great deal to keep the Teagues at a distance when once their cab caught the car.

"I s'pose," said Sara, beaming, before the cab had stopped. "As you didn't see us wave, me lord. If you 'ad, me lord, you'd 'ave stopped. Lucy and Jack, won't you tell 'is lordship 'oo your sister and brother hare?"

"Someone's been pullin' your leg," said Lance, using words which scarcely fitted the position he intended to assume. "I'm the shover man. 'Oo's been tellin' you lies as I'm a bloomin' lord?"

Lucy tried to be serious, but could not repress a titter. Moreover, Lance had either forgotten or disregarded the fact that he was in uniform.

Sara, with wide open eyes, cried to her husband, "Well, Brine, 'oo'd 'ave believed as Captain Cutwater 'ud——"

"Drive on," Brian shouted to the taxi-man. "It's him tellin' lies, mammy," he said furiously. "Do shovers wear a captain's uniform? Oh!" he added, "if you don't want anything to do with us, don't trouble yourself. I reckon we're as good as any of you, anyhow. I've been torpedered three times and didn't care a damn! What have *you* done?"

"There!" said Sara. "I never thought of 'is clobber! But 'old on, Brine. You don't want to put on yer Hirish wyes. Lots o' them torfs like a joke. He! He! He! 'Ow funny yer lordship is," she said, trying to be ingratiating.

"'Old on," she cried again, as the taxi-man got under way in response to Brian's signals. "Lor, Brine, you're enough to mike a body swear!"

"Sit down," shouted Brian. "Let's fetch our things from your brother and sister's house, and get under way. I've had enough of it. Brother and sister, indeed! A fine lot o' relations you've got. I've half a mind not to leave you here."

"I've an 'ole one to stye then," flared up Sara. "You 'aven't got 'old of a slive and don't you think it. I shell stye 'ere a dye or two and see 'is lordship agine. Lord! Brine, you don't hunderstand the wyes of the torfs. 'E on'y meant to be amusin'."

But Brian's temper was roused. Arrived at Lambyre Road he stormed into the house, shouldered the luggage already packed, and got himself and his wife out of the house before the return of Jack and his party. He tossed half a crown to the grinning Gladys. "You can tell your master and missis," he said, "as they've seen the last o' me. No. I don't want to see either of 'em, and I won't wait."

Mortified, but obedient, Sara accompanied Brian to the lodgings she had taken on the front, and soon after, the man caught a train for Bristol on his way to Port Talbot.

"If I don't see you the day after to-morrow, I shall come and fetch you," he said. "And I'd rather you came with me.!"

"I'll 'ave another try," said Sara. "And any'ow they can't heat me."

"When 'e's gorn I'll 'ave another go with Mibel," she thought. "And 'e'll 'ave got 'is temper back when I see him agine."

"I wish I'd never wrote to 'em," thought Brian. "I don't understand folk like them. I'm as good as them. But somehow they seem to put me and mammy in a hole. Polite enough mostly. But like ruddy icicles except that lord fellow. And he's as cheeky a bit o' goods as ever I saw. I wish I had him on my ship for a cruise. I'd learn him how to treat a captain!"

CHAPTER XX

CHANGES

"WHAT ?" cried Jack on his return home when Gladys told him that the Teagues had taken their departure, "Gone ? And taken their things ? Oh ! Good man !"

He turned radiantly to Lucy and Roger. "What luck," he said. "I was afraid that the woman would have stuck like glue when she found out that Lance Perryman was the Earl of Scratby's son !"

"She did not wish to go, I'm sure," said Lucy. "It was her husband who made her I expect."

"Poor devil. He's not such a bad sort," said Jack. "Still, well you know what I mean."

"Quite so," laughed Roger. "He's all right if you can keep him at a distance. But at the close quarters at which he engaged you Jack—well !"

"Where's your mistress ?" Jack asked of Gladys.

"She's layin' down. She come over queer like, sir. She says please don't no one go up without it's Miss Lucy."

"Very well. Take this fish in and let us have it for lunch as soon as you can manage it."

"I think I will go up to her and see if there is anything I can do," suggested Lucy.

"All right. You'd better tell her that I am off to town this afternoon. I daresay she has overdone the late hours and frivolity and that sort of thing, and is a bit tired. You'll see what you think."

Lucy and Beatie left the men and went upstairs, only the former making her way to Mabel's room.

"She's a good sort that sister-in-law of mine," said Jack, uncorking a bottle of French Vermouth. Flanked by a bottle of Plymouth gin there were materials for a cocktail which promised well, and which the two officers were soon tasting.

"You know what I think of her," replied Roger.

"Well, my son, you'll have your chance while I'm away. There is no one in your way."

"I'm not so sure. Lance Perryman is hit too you know. And they got on marvellously well together this morning."

"Lance Perryman! My dear chap, Lucy is not a girl to care about his title or his money. And you don't suggest that she's such a fool as to prefer him to you."

"Oh, he can be very pleasant when he likes, and you know he is not half such an ass as he pretends to be."

"But his pretence is enough to put a girl like her off."

"He dropped the pretence a good deal this morning. I tell you, old chap, she seemed to run to him more than she did to me."

"Oh, tosh. Go in and win, old son. I shall leave you in charge, and if you can't make things right by the time I come back, I shall think you've foozled it because you were not sufficiently keen on her."

"Oh, ain't I though?" said Roger, lugubriously. "At all events you wish me luck, don't you? And, Jack, for God's sake, don't say I'm left in charge. Of course, I'll do all I can for them. But if you tell them that——"

"We had all that before. I understand. And, of course, I won't handicap you. Have another drink, my son."

Lucy opened Mabel's door very softly, and, on finding her sister apparently sound asleep, she withdrew without waking her.

She soon "tidied herself," and ran down to the kitchen, avoiding the boudoir to which Jack and Roger had retired.

"Did Mrs. Greenfield go to bed as soon as she got home, Gladys ?" Lucy asked the maid.

Lucy had shown herself dexterous in housework, had helped the servant in several ways, and by her frank and joyous nature had won the girl's approval. While Mabel, poising herself uneasily on her tottering social elevation, had sometimes treated her maid with a harshness and abruptness which showed her lack of breeding. Lucy in her freedom from affectation and conceit instinctively assumed the right manner with a domestic servant, that of kindly firmness. And the girl appreciated the difference.

"Oh, no, miss. It wasn't till that Tompkins upset her. I found her in highstrikes in the booder after he'd gone."

"Ah. Well I think I should not say anything about it to anyone else you know, Gladys. No doubt she will tell me what she wishes when she wakes."

"He's a nasty slimy toad that Tompkins," said Gladys, who had her own reasons for disliking the man apart from his omission to offer her her due guerdon. "But I think the missis has done with 'im now." She grinned and tossed her head, regarding Lucy with a sidelong glance. She was wondering if she should make further disclosures, but thought it better to retain them for the present.

"No doubt she will tell me all she wishes," said Lucy again. "Now shall I help you with the fish, Gladys ? You know I come from a place where there is a lot of fish, and I'm rather proud of my cooking."

"Thank you, miss. I'll be a settin' the table, if you'll be so kind."

The influence of Lucy was extending to the kitchen.

If she remained long at Lambyre Road, Gladys would become quite a good servant.

Towards the end of lunch the name of Tompkins cropped up, and Jack remembered that he had a warning to give Beatie. "By the way, Beatie," he said, "I don't wish you to see anything of Mr. Tompkins while I am away. I am sure you will do as I wish, won't you? We have become real pals now, haven't we?"

And Beatie, who was imbibing manners and sense from association with Lucy and Roger as a plant absorbs moisture through its leaves as well as its roots, acquiesced. "I don't want to faver," she said. "I don't like Tommy any better van you do now."

"Oh! How's that? I'm delighted to hear it, my poppet, but whence this sudden change?"

"It isn't azackly sudden," explained Beatie, thoughtfully. "It's been comin' on some time."

Mabel woke from her sleep while the others were at lunch. At first she looked about her wonderingly, unable to remember how it was that she found herself in bed during broad daylight—for through the lowered blind sufficient sunlight penetrated to indicate that it was not yet near evening.

Then the recollection of the scene with Tompkins which she had undergone came to her, and she shuddered with disgust. But her rest had been beneficial, and she now thought of her ordeal with anger rather than horror.

And Percy Burnside! The tenderness with which she had endeavoured to excuse the Colonel left her. In a way, his misdemeanour, whatever it was, was, she thought, as inexcusable as Tompkins's insolence, though it had certainly been less disgusting—and, on that account, more dangerous!

Yet had she been entirely innocent?

For the first time she began to question herself, to wonder whether she had not brought her troubles partly on herself.

And this showed a great stride in the moral development of the woman. Hitherto, she had always been content to lay the blame of her trials on others. Hitherto, her panoply of selfishness had warded off the arrows which her lethargic conscience had now and then endeavoured to dart at her.

She began to think that she had not properly understood Adoline Horrex. What did the latter mean when she asked her if she ought to dismiss the Colonel when she said that there were some things she barred. Vaguely Mabel felt that there was a lightness, a *persiflage*, about the set at Cockleview which she had not fully appreciated

A sense of unworthiness stole over Mabel. She felt humbler than she had felt since she had led Jack captive to the altar.

Being in a contrite mood she now turned her thoughts to Jack. Had she been fair to him ? He had been right about Tompkins. She saw that now. And he had borne himself so well in the company of the Cockleview set, so easily and naturally. Of course, she had always known that she had "married above her." But for years she had forgotten exactly what this meant, and because Jack had been inclined to ridicule her social efforts, she had come to consider him as beneath her. Now she began to see his point of view. That to be natural is to be well bred, and that falsely to assume the possession of qualities, wealth or station, of indeed anything, was a mark of ill-breeding. How absurd Sara had been. And how well Jack had taken the surprise of having a sister-in-law of her class sprung upon him. Suddenly Mabel's dark brows knitted, and she frowned. Her thin lips tightened, and her great eyes darkened. Could it be that Sara was only a caricature of herself ?

Lucy was different. Lucy was more like Jack in her natural acceptance of things as they came. There had never been any pretence about Lucy. And both Roger and Lance Perryman had shown how highly they thought of her, of her upon whom she, Mabel, had always been inclined to look down.

She heard a soft step outside the door, and on looking round saw Lucy thrust her head into the room as she held the door half open.

"You're awake then, dear," said Lucy, seeing her sister's eyes fixed upon her. "May I come in?"

"Yes. I told Gladys I wished to see you. Oh Luce, I have had an awful time! Sit down on the bed and let me tell you."

Lucy did as she was requested and listened with growing amazement to Mabel's tale of Tompkins. Mabel thought the Tompkins incident was enough to relate without mentioning Percy Burnside.

"I always thought the man a cad," cried Lucy. "Oh, Mabs, will you tell Jack?"

"What would you do?"

"Oh, I shouldn't. Why Jack would half kill the man. No. You must cut the beast of course. And Jack has already forbidden him the house so he won't think this strange. Of course you don't know yet that Jack has to go to town this afternoon. The War Office wants him there at ten to-morrow morning."

"Oh! But I can't be left here with you and the Teagues!"

"They've gone. I forgot you wouldn't know that. The captain took offence, because Captain Perryman would not drive him and Sara home. At least that was part of the reason. I wouldn't let him. I didn't think you'd like it."

"I'm glad you stopped it. The cheek of the woman. Of course it was she who tried it on.

"Yes, she *would* call him 'my lord,' and he declared that he was a chauffeur and joked in his way you know. So they came on in the taxi they had taken, I believe on purpose to catch us up, and Gladys says that he fetched their things down and they both drove off."

"Thank goodness!"

Mabel was silent for a few minutes. Then she said: "Ask Jack to come up to me, will you, dear? I don't think I shall tell him about Tompkins. I'm not sure. But I shall say that the man came down and tried to persuade me to take some more vegetables. That is true enough, though he said I should not have them afterwards. Oh! Oh! Oh!" She began to laugh again a little hysterically as the man's preposterous leavetaking recurred to her; but, to Lucy's relief, she succeeded in checking herself.

"Yes. That will do," said Lucy. "I know Jack wants to see you."

She ran downstairs with the message.

"You'll wait here till I come down again, Roger," asked Jack. "Lucy will see you don't pinch anything. Won't you Luce?"

"I mean to though, if I can," replied Roger, with a smile. Jack understood him, and grinned. And Lucy understood too, and blushed.

"Jack, dear," said Mabel, as her husband entered her room.

Jack looked at her with surprise. It was the first time she had called him "Jack, dear," save in public, for a very long time.

"Yes?" he said.

"Kiss me, Jack," said Mabel, beginning to cry a little. "Oh, Jack, I haven't been nice to you. I—I've been a fool caring about getting to know people and all that. I'll be nicer in future, Jack. Kiss me to show you believe me."

Jack bent and kissed her. There was no great ardour in his kiss. He had been fond of her, very fond, when he married her. But her long neglect, and her indifference to his affection had deadened his love. He loved her as the mother of his child. But it was a very cool and staid kind of love, without an atom of passion in it.

Mabel read the truth in the coldness of his lips, and began to cry in earnest. She caught his hand in hers. "Jack," she said, "don't leave me here. Take me up to town with you, will you, please? I shan't have you here for long. Don't let us be separated while your leave lasts."

Jack thought that this was rather quaint considering the way in which she had spent most of her time up at Cockleview, and had seemed quite content to leave him to do as best he could with Lucy and the Teagues. But he was a kind man, and he remembered that on his way home from the Rock he had anticipated a renewal of his love, a second honeymoon. Something had changed Mabel in an inexplicable way. Well, well, it might be politic not to inquire as to the causes of the change, but to accept it, and endeavour to recall the love which he had felt slipping from him every day since his return.

"Then you'll take me with you?"

"I'm afraid you'll be so bored. I may have to be at the War Office nearly all day."

Mabel began to cry softly. She was still a little overwrought. "Oh, Jack!" she whimpered. "I don't want to be left behind, please. I'm—I'm afraid of that horrible man Tompkins!"

Jack's face grew very stern. "What has be been doing?" he asked. "I thought you resented my treatment of him, that he was a friend of yours. Of course you know I loathe the beast."

And then Mabel, with her great eyes beseeching her husband's for comprehension and for the mercy that so often goes with it, faltered out a bowdlerised version of what had taken place that morning. "I never suspected anything of the kind, Jack," she assured him, and at the moment believed that she spoke the truth. "Tell me you know that I did not."

Toned down as was her account of Tompkins's conduct, it was sufficient to set Jack's blood boiling for a horsewhip in one hand and Tompkins in the other. He repressed the burst of words which leapt to his lips, but his expression alarmed his wife, and she timidly took his hand and kissed it.

At last he said, "I don't suppose that you did imagine that the man would dare to go so far. But, Mabel, I can't help saying that you were imprudent. In a way you asked for it. Give me your word that you have told me everything."

And Mabel, womanlike, gave her word, believing that if she had made certain reservations she was justified in so doing.

"You will take me with you, won't you?" she begged again.

"Very well, old girl," said Jack.

And now he bent and kissed his wife more warmly than he had kissed her since his return on leave. His heart was lightened. Perhaps, after all, his marriage might prove to be a happy one. Mabel put her arms round his neck and clung to him, kissing him with an ardour which surprised him. She was glowing with a rosy flush, and her eyes were gleaming with a new charm when he rose to his full height. Her expression was softer and yet more fervent than ever before. Never had she looked so lovely.

"And now, my dear," said Jack, "for that blackguard Tompkins!"

"You won't be—you won't be too violent, Jack?" asked Mabel, wistfully. "Don't forget how strong you are!"

"What? Anxious about that swine still?" said Jack, scornfully. "Afraid I shall spoil his beauty?"

"Oh, it is not that! You know it is not, dear!" cried Mabel, earnestly. "I loathe the man as much as you can. More. Ugh!" She shivered at the recollection of the sight of the man, the touch of him, even the very smell of him with his hair oil and cigarette sodden moustache. "But—but you know that you are terribly strong, and I don't want you to get into trouble for killing him."

"Oh, I won't kill him." Jack spoke with savage disdain. "I'll take Roger with me, and you may be sure that Tompkins won't talk after I've done with him. But, by Jupiter! He shall yell while I'm giving him a lesson!"

He strode from the room, and in a few minutes Mabel heard the footsteps of her husband and Roger Upton, springing up the stone stairs towards the high road with a buoyancy and eagerness which boded ill for Tompkins.

CHAPTER XXI

TOMPKINS'S REWARD

" Do you think he will see you ? " Roger asked as he and Jack passed swiftly through the garden which Tompkins had so earnestly invited the latter to inspect. " He won't if he sees your expression, old son, Smile, my boy. Smile. You'll frighten the liver out of him if he catches sight of that face."

" He won't guess what I want to see him about. He won't imagine that Mabel has given him away."

But that was exactly what Tompkins did think when he saw the two men approaching his house on the hill.

" She's told him ! " he thought. " She's told him ! Oh, my God ! And I believed she wished me to make love to her, that she was fond of me, the little devil ! She led me on. I shall tell him she led me on ! "

He would gladly have extricated himself at the cost of the woman had he been able to do so. He was just the sort of man to play " Adam " and whine " the woman tempted me."

How he wished he had a servant. He would not open the door. Not he ! He had caught sight of the two men striding up towards his house, he had seen the determination of their gait as they passed through the garden, that garden in which he took so much pride ! And his guilty conscience deprived him of the little courage with which nature had endowed him.

He took the precaution to lock the front door before he retreated to the rear. But men like them might stand and hammer at his door till all Lambyre Road emerged into the street to see what was happening. And he was terribly sensitive to publicity.

"Aggie, Aggie," he called to his wife.

"Well, what is it?" came a thin, creaking voice from the kitchen.

"Lock the scullery door," said Tompkins, endeavouring to modulate his voice so that it would not be heard outside the house.

After a moment's delay in order to give his wife time to do as he had requested, he slunk into the kitchen.

Poor little Aggie Tompkins, a wizen, haggard, weary looking, grey haired woman, who had long lost the comeliness which had once won her bad husband, was standing over the big deal kitchen table kneading a mass of flour and other ingredients in a wide and deep earthenware pan. Her pale toneless eyes sought her husband shyly. Her pale thin lips trembled at his approach. Though she had long lost all affection for him she nevertheless resented the attentions he had paid first to Muriel Wallis and lately to Mabel Greenfield. It had long been the talk of Lambyre Road that while Tompkins was a daily or twice daily visitor of Mabel prior to Jack's homecoming, Aggie never accompanied him.

"Have you locked that door?" snarled Tompkins.

"Oh, my God! Here they are!"

The approach to the house from Lambyre Road could not be seen from the kitchen, and Aggie was ignorant of the identity of the visitors.

"Why, Timothy!" she quavered. "What is the matter? Who is it?"

"It is Captain Greenfield and his friend," moaned Timothy. "And I don't want to see them. D'you think they'll come round and try at the back?"

Aggie began to smile grimly. So the punishment was come at last. Well, she would not help to spare him anything of what he had earned. But for her own sake—for Tompkins, like most cowards, could be brutal and cruel to the woman whom he had sworn to cherish and who had not the strength nor the spirit to protect herself from his violence—she must pretend to assist him to the best of her ability. Fortunately she could act like the idiot she often pretended to be, a rôle which enabled her to defend herself and at the same time to obtain a small modicum of revenge, inadequate enough it is true, but very enjoyable.

"There is the coal shoot," she said.

"You idiot! They won't dirty themselves by getting in that."

"Won't they? I didn't know. I thought, perhaps, Captain Greenfield might want to see you so much, that he would not mind getting a little black to——"

"Fool! There they go again!" he whined, as thunderous knocks sent a tremor through out the whole frail building.

"Why don't you answer the door?" asked Aggie, with an assumption of naiveté which was admirable. "They will injure the panels."

"Didn't you hear me say I didn't want to see them?" asked the man. He longed to shout at her, but dared not lest his voice might be heard outside. He was champing his jaws with rage at his wife, and trembling in every limb with terror at what might be impending for him from Jack and Roger. There was something quaintly humorous in the incongruity of his desires, and Aggie permitted herself a little sardonic grin.

"They've found the bell button," she remarked, casually, as the electric bell began to thrill through the kitchen.

Tompkins worked his jaws in impotent fury. He glanced round through the corners of his eyes like a rat at bay.

"Go and tell them I'm out. Say I've gone to Lyemouth, and you don't know when I shall be home. Make haste, woman, or they'll come round here."

"Well, why shouldn't they?" asked Aggie. "I don't mind seeing them. Why are you so frightened, Timothy? What have you been doing? I suppose someone has told Captain Greenfield how often you call on his wife. But I thought you had been there once or twice since he came home. I——"

"Damnation, I don't care what you thought. Do as I tell you. Go and open the door—keep it on the chain though—and tell 'em that."

"But it is not true. And, perhaps, they'll keep a look out to see if you return. Captain Greenfield lives just opposite, you know. At least you ought to."

"My God, was ever a man maddened by such an idiot! Go and open the door, but keep the chain on so they can't get in. Tell them I——"

"You need not say it all again," said Aggie, quite briskly for her, so delighted she felt at the turn things had taken.

She wiped her hands on the apron she wore, and then strolled without haste to the sink in the scullery and began to wash them.

"Are you going, or are you not?" asked Tompkins, keeping his voice low with great difficulty.

"I must wash my hands, Timothy. You can't expect me to open the door to two gentleman all over flour?"

"Why not? That would be an excuse for having kept them waiting. Lord, listen to that!"

Finding that the bell had no more effect than the first knocks, the two officers had reverted to the latter, and again blows rained on the door.

Jack had found an old riding whip, which had been brought from Herringhaven because he valued it as a gift from his father. The butt was loaded with a lump of lead, and the noise it made on the panels was appalling to the anxious ears of Tompkins.

"I'm to say you are at Lyemouth, and I don't know when you will be back. Tehe! Tehe! Why, it's quite a game," said Aggie, conscious that this would infuriate her husband.

The noise without was diminishing. Indeed, Roger already suggested that enough clamour had been made to wake the dead to say nothing of Tompkins. "We can't force a way in, old son, you know," he said. "You are bound to catch him sooner or later."

"Yes. But I've got to go to town this afternoon, and there is no time to spare," said Jack, with another mighty blow from the loaded butt of the riding whip.

It was such a hefty smite that it made Roger look askance at the whip. "I say, old son," he said. "You'll confine yourself to the lash and whalebone, won't you? If you start in with the butt end, you'll kill the man."

"I don't care a damn if I do. The best thing for him."

"Yes, but not for you, and I'm not going to see a promising officer lost to us through a little recklessness. No, no, Jack old boy. Thrash him as much as you like. But no murderous assault game. Not worth it, dear boy. Hullo! I believe someone is coming at last."

The door opened about four inches, and the ash hued face of Aggie became partly visible. So did the chain by which the door was still rendered a barrier.

Neither of the officers had previously seen Aggie, but they naturally guessed who she was.

"Mrs. Tompkins?" they said in unison. "I'm afraid we've been making a dreadful noise," added Roger. "We thought, perhaps, no one was in."

"You ass," muttered Jack. "Is that an excuse for half knocking the house down."

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," said Aggie. "Who is it, please?"

"Captain Greenfield and Major Upton," said Roger. "Mr. Tompkins at home?"

"Er——," said Jack, unsteadily. "He has pressed me to come up and see his garden, wants something to kill caterpillars, I believe. He'll be glad to see us."

Aggie grinned, broadly for her. "He will be sorry to have missed you," she said. "But he has had to go to Lyemouth. I don't know when he will be back."

"Oh!" said Jack, really disappointed. The story might be true. But there was something in Aggie's grin which warned him that she was not telling the truth. There was, moreover, the chain. Was it Aggie's usual custom to keep the door on the chain if she opened it during the day? There again, it was possible that it *was* her custom. The house stood by itself, rather lonely, and a tramp might make himself very objectionable before any aid could be summoned.

"Are you sure?" he asked, very sillily.

"My dear man," protested Roger, "the lady must know. Have I the honour of speaking to Mrs. Tompkins?" he asked, for his previous question had remained unanswered.

"Yes. I am Mrs. Tompkins, and I am not in the habit of telling lies," snapped Aggie. "I really am not in the habit." she repeated, aware that her husband was listening to every word that was said, and was gasping with fright lest she should betray him. Her repetition of the words "in the habit" would madden him she knew, and again she permitted herself a grin which was broader than it was discreet.

"He's in the house, I'm sure of it," Jack muttered in Roger's ear.

"You can't do anything if you are," replied Roger. "You can't tell a lady she's a liar, and you can't use force. You must wait your time, old man."

"No, no. I beg your pardon," Jack said aloud. "But I am so disappointed. I wanted to see Mr. Tompkins so much before I left."

"He will be so sorry," said Aggie again.

"Say you want to put a misunderstanding right," Roger murmured in his turn. He was of the same opinion as his friend, and felt confident that Tompkins was hiding in the house.

"There was a little misunderstanding at mine the other morning," said Jack. "I wished to put it right. But, of course, as he is away——"

Tompkins heard the words. Had it not been for his insolence that morning he would have been deceived and come forward.

"I'll tell him, thank you," said Aggie.

And then it happened. In her culinary operations she had had occasion to use a certain quantity of cayenne pepper, and in some way a pinch or two of this was blown onto the stove while Tompkins was hovering near it. One whiff was enough, and even as his wife was promising to tell him of Jack's call on his return, a most stupendous and ostentatiously masculine sneeze roared out along the passage from the kitchen to the front door. It was not an ordinary sneeze, but one which was memorable in the history of sneezes, and it rent the atmosphere. To make matters worse, if they could be made worse for Timothy, his temper, already giving way, quite broke down before this lamentable occurrence, and in the midst of a succession of sneezes, curses jerked hiccoughing out which made the officers ashamed to look Aggie in the face.

"I'm sorry, madam," said Jack, firmly. "But it has to be done. Stand aside, please."

He waved the woman away and then flung himself with all his might at the door.

The chain was only intended to withstand ordinary pressure, and such a shock as that imparted by Jack's powerful onset was too much for it. With a rending crash the door fell open, and on the very heels of Aggie's flying shape Jack went storming in, followed by Roger who could hardly run, so doubled up was he with laughter.

Tompkins was helpless, in the throes of his sternutation. But he did his best to escape. He was at the foot of the stairs, leading upwards when Jack caught him.

"Whatuttuttuttuttermean ?" gasped Tompkins, as he felt himself firmly gripped by the coat collar, and swung round to offer a fair aim for the whip of which he had already caught sight.

"How dare you ?" began Aggie, stirred by a momentary wifely instinct to protect her husband.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Tompkins," said Jack, getting a firmer grip on the coat collar, "but I assure you that you would heartily agree with my procedure, if you knew the cause of it. Shall I tell her, you swine ?" he asked the quivering Tompkins.

And Tompkins quavered out, "Nunununo."

Roger occupied himself in leading Aggie away. "He really deserves it," he assured her.

Aggie, conscious that her husband could now neither hear nor see anything but Jack and his own yells, said demurely, to Roger's intense delight, "Oh! I know it !"

And Tompkins knew it too. He did his best to suppress his shrieks lest they should lead to inquiry. It was bad enough to take such a thrashing. It would be worse if the reason for it became public.

It was only when his coat was torn in many places, and his back was ridged with wales, that Jack ceased to lash the man, chiefly from lack of breath to continue the punishment.

"There!" he said, with a final swoosh. "You've had enough for some time. And mind this, you filthy swine, you dirty Hun, that if you ever dare to speak to any member of my family or, yes, dammit, of my friends, I'll thrash you again first and then publish the cause of it afterwards. Understand? Garrrrrh!"

He flung the quivering mass of tortured limbs from him into a corner of the hall, where the thing lay, whimpering, groaning, but, nevertheless, sufficiently self-possessed to avoid shrieking so loudly as to be heard in the road.

With a last look at the shuddering heap, Jack turned to go. "Come on, Roger," he said. "I must see about catching my train." He hesitated for a moment and the grinning Roger stepped out on to the front doorstep. Then he called back, "Sorry, Mrs. Tompkins."

He always declares that he heard a giggle in reply to his farewell salutation.

"That's a good job well done," he said, complacently, as he strode along by Roger's side downhill again.

"Hope Tompkins thinks so," laughed Roger. "My word, old son, what made me laugh was to see the way he tried to keep his yells in. Oh, he deserved it. Lord, how sore he'll be to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XXII

ROGER LEFT IN CHARGE

WHILE Jack and Roger were inflicting his well-merited chastisement on Tompkins, Mabel rose and dressed, and by the time that they returned she was engaged in packing sufficient articles of clothing for her trip to town.

Lucy and Beatie were assisting her when they heard the men's footsteps in the hall.

"Run down, Luce, and see what has happened," said Mabel.

"May I go too, mummy?" asked Beatie. And her mother, willing to be by herself for a little time, accorded her permission.

At last she closed the bag she was packing, looked in the glass and tidied her hair, and ran downstairs.

"Well?" she asked, looking round at the four occupants of the dining-room. "Something seems to have amused you."

For all four, Jack, Roger, Lucy and Beatie were laughing heartily.

"You'll be troubled no more with friend Tompkins," said Jack, ceasing to laugh. "I can promise you that."

"You found him in then?"

"He forced his way in," laughed Roger. "My dear Mrs. Greenfield, you ought to have seen him. Poor little Mrs. Tompkins went aside like a fleck of foam. It was the sneezing that gave him away! I doubt if we should have gone in if he had not sneezed!"

They gave her a brief resumé of the story they had already told to Lucy. And Jack then said, "It beats me how you ever put up with the man. Anyone could see he was a blighter with half an eye." He looked a little sternly at his wife, and instead of resenting it, she dropped her eyelids and said, "I was silly, Jack. I'm sorry."

Jack exchanged glances with Lucy. This was a change indeed. His heart softened towards his wife. "Never mind now, old girl," he said. "And, I say, you've had no lunch. You'd better have something before we start. Roger, do you mind being errand boy and fetching a cab. We ought to leave here in about three quarters of an hour."

"No. Let Beatie and Lucy go," said Mabel. "I want to talk to Major Upton. Beatie can show Lucy where to get a cab."

"Hang it all," protested Jack, thinking that Lucy ought to remain while Roger was there. "Beatie is old enough to go by herself."

"Oh, yes," said Beatie. "I don't mind."

"Lucy won't mind going, will you, dear?"

"Let me go, too," said Roger.

"No. I want to talk to you. Remember you are to be left in charge, and I want to give you directions," said Mabel with a smile.

So presently Lucy and Beatie went out down the town, and Mabel had her chance of saying what she wished to the major.

"Jack has told me about you and Lucy," she said. "And I wanted to say, that I hope you will not keep away from here in our absence, because of any conventional scruples. Beatie is quite sufficient as a chaperon, and in these times one must make hay when the sun shines."

Roger had never liked his friend's wife so well as at that moment. He took her hand and kissed it.

"My dear lady," he said, "I am sincerely grateful to you. Do you think I have a chance? She got on so well with Lance this morning, and I know he is keen on her."

For just an instant, Mabel's former inclinations made her hesitate. It would be so great a thing to have Lance for a brother-in-law. But her later mood prevailed. Besides, it would not be nice to be "cut out" by a sister in so marked a manner. Nor could she feel confident that Lance was in earnest. His manner was always easy and pleasant with girls. She had seen him behave to one of the guests at Cockleview with almost as much *empressement* as she had seen him show Lucy.

"I don't think you need fear him," she said. "But, if you will take my advice, I should bring him with you as often as you can. Let her see the two of you together, and she will soon satisfy you that she prefers you. Don't try to keep him away, or she may resent it and favour him out of sheer malice, like any other woman."

Roger laughed. "Thank you, for your frankness," he said. "I will take advantage of your advice."

"Will there be any bother about Tompkins?" asked Mabel.

"I don't think so. It seemed to me as though he had expected trouble."

"Oh, Major Upton," said Mabel, hesitating, "will you tell Mrs. Horrex that I've gone to town. She said something about calling to take me to the tennis club. I——I don't think I care to go there anymore, and when I come home I'm afraid I shan't have time to be up at Cockleview so much."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jack. "You were keen on getting to know that lot, so I let you have your way, and thanks to Roger you had it. I'm not sorry you have had enough of it. They are very kind and jolly, but I don't think I want you to be too thick there. What do you say, Roger ? "

"I think you are right. Mind you, there isn't a better woman in all England than Adoline Horrex. Sometimes she gets a bit too reckless for my taste. I mean, I don't think you'd find that Miss Lightfoot would run to her."

"And, of course, if she doesn't run to her she must be wrong. Oh, Major Upton, I'm afraid you have caught it very badly," laughed Mabel.

"I'm not ashamed of it, anyway," said Roger. "I'm hanged if I am. And I do believe that Miss Lightfoot is better without joining that set, though, mind you, they are tremendously kind."

"They were very nice to me," cried Mabel. "And Adoline is the most charming woman I ever met."

"Well, run along, dear, and get something to eat," said Jack. There's plenty of cold salmon left."

"I say, old man," said Jack, when his wife had left him and Roger together, "have you noticed a bit of difference in her, or have you seen too little of her to spot it ? "

"It's hardly fair for me to say. But, I believe, I understand, and I *have* noticed something. I congratulate you."

"Yes, thank you. Things do look a bit better. Upon my word, I feel chirpier than I've felt for nine years and more. I shall always thank my stars I met you here. Something has happened which has done her good. And it is owing to you that she got to know that crowd."

"I'm sure that you are not half so grateful for meeting me as I am for meeting you, old chap. If only Miss Lightfoot——"

"Oh, Lucy's got sense. And she likes you if nothing more. I'll bet you—I'll bet you a box of Cabanas that it will be all right."

"You're on. And I hope I shall lose."

As is usual in Cocklemouth at that time of year, it was no easy matter for Lucy and Beatie to find a disengaged cabman who would consent to take a fare from Lambyre Road to the station. There are so many visitors who are willing to hire cabs for long drives, thoughtlessly indifferent to the torture they inflict on the half-starved horses, that a mere two shilling or half-a-crown fare is spurned by the drivers. It was only by securing a man who had just driven a party of five eight miles over very hilly country behind his one old and emaciated horse, and who was ruefully conscious that another long drive would kill his animal, that a conveyance was at last secured. It had taken so long that the two girls immediately drove back to the house, and only a few minutes later the Greenfields started for the station.

"You'll come up to-morrow, Roger," were Jack's last words to his friend, "to see that Tompkins is not annoying Lucy."

"I will," replied Roger.

"Oh, thank you, Major Upton," said Lucy.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTERNOON CALLERS

ON the afternoon following the departure of Jack and Mabel for London, Lucy and Beatie were sitting in the boudoir chatting to Roger Upton and Lance Perryman. Nothing had been heard of Tompkins, and Roger expressed his opinion that the beaten man would take his thrashing without advertising it.

"I wish I'd been there," cried Lance, laughing. "I'd have given the world to see Greenfield laying it on. You were not really afraid he would kick up a rumpus were you, Miss Lightfoot ?"

"I don't think I worried much about it," said Lucy. "But listen. There is the front door bell. I wonder who it can be."

"I forgot to tell you," said Lance, "that I saw that woman, the one who called me my lord you know, on the front this morning. She had tacked on to old Cutwater, who was trying to dodge her. She saw me, and gave chase. But I was in the car and cleared, perhaps she has come to see you."

"I thought she had left the town with her husband," said Lucy. "I hope she won't come while you are here."

Glady's made her appearance at this juncture. "Mrs. Teague, Miss," said she.

Lucy looked round at the two men half humorously, and rose to greet Sara as she came bustling in, wiping the perspiration from her forehead.

"Lor, Luce," said Sara, "ain't it 'ot ? I'm all in a bath. Why, it's 'is lordship. I 'ope you're well, my lord, and you too, Major."

"You do me proud, Madam," said Lance, with a low bow, and an apologetic glance at Lucy who looked at him reproachfully. "But I have no claim to what Mr. Verdant Green called the proud title. No lord am I, but simple mister."

"Yer pa's a hearl, ain't 'e? Very well, then, you must be a lord," insisted Sara. "Ain't I right, Major?"

"I'm afraid not," repled Roger. "However well our friend would grace the title, the inexorable fates deny him the right to bear it. But he does himself an injustice in saying that he is plain mister——"

"Shut up, you ass," muttered Lance.

"To give him correct appellation, to bestow upon him the proper dignity with which his noble birth has dowered him, we humbler commoners should call him the Honourable Lancelot Perryman, although, for purposes of convenience and brevity, we generally call him mister, otherwise the Lamprey."

"Lor!" ejaculated Sara, overcome by Roger's resounding pomposity. "I don't understand 'alf what you say, but no doubt you mean it kind. Well, Luce, 'ow is it neether Mibel or Jack's in?"

"Jack had to go up to the War Office yesterday and Mabel went with him," replied Lucy. "I thought you had left the town too."

"The Captain went. But I made up my mind to stye on to mike myself beknown to Mrs. 'Orrex and party. I 'oped Mibel would ha' took me up, or harsked me to meet 'er swell friends 'ere. But you'll do as well. Now Luce, be a good gal and say when you'll tike me to see Mrs. 'Orrex."

"I'm afraid I shall not do as well. I have not met the lady."

"Ain't you neether, Beatie?" asked the woman.

"Why, my dear, you ain't kissed yer aunt yet. Come 'ere and do it d'rectly."

Beatie wriggled and tossed her pigtails. "I don't like kissing, please," she said. "And mummy says I needn't, unless I like."

"Well! What the gals is comin' to I'm sure I don't know. We wasn't like them when I was a gal, not as that was so long ago neether."

She tossed her head and bridled.

"You *'ave* got a nasty corf," she remarked to Lance, who was spluttering behind his handkerchief to conceal his laughter. "I'll get you some o' them corf drops as the Captain brought me 'ome from Bunnys Airs. Then, p'raps, you could tike me up to yer friends. I see you've got your motor houtside."

"I should be delighted," protested Lance. "But there's no one up there this afternoon. They're all gone out to a tennis tournament."

"Ain't we goin' to 'ave no tea, Luce ?" asked Sara. "The walk 'ere and the 'eat 'ave made me that dry, I could shift a pot."

Lucy rose to ring the bell, but Roger sprang to his feet and anticipated her. She looked appealingly at him; and he approached her. "Can't you get Mr. Perryman away ?" she whispered.

"I'm afraid not. He is in his element." Roger whispered back. "But he won't tittle-tattle about it you know."

Lucy shrugged her shoulders and prepared herself to endure. Sara was explaining to Lance. "You see Mister Honourable," she said, "it's like this 'ere. My mother married my father fust, then 'e died and she married Lightfoot. That's 'ow it was."

"I don't think our family complications will interest Captain Perryman," said Lucy.

"There now. I'd got it wrong again. It ought to be Honourable Captain. I'm sure, I beg yer pardon."

"We don't usually use the honourable," suggested Roger, in pity for Lucy. "It is such a mouthful you see. I'm quite sure our blue blooded friend would be content with Captain. In spite of his lofty position, he is very condescending and mixes with us just like one of ourselves."

"Oh, Major Upton," whispered Lucy. "You are as bad as he is. Don't make me laugh. I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"She's a darling!" thought Roger. "Tender-hearted even when she is suffering. Bless her heart. Lance shan't have her. I'm damned if he shall."

"Well, I've done. I was on'y esplainin' to 'im," said Sara."

Gladys received orders to bring in tea, and was about to leave the room when Sara said: "Ain't you got somefin' wet as would do for a stay, till the tea come, Luce? Is all the rum and whisky gorn as Brine brought? Or ain't there a drop of anyfing in the 'ouse?"

"I'll get some whisky," cried Beatie, seizing the excuse to get away. The child felt the ignominy of being related to Sara more than did Lucy. And she need no longer stay as chaperon.

Presently she returned with a decanter, a carafe of water and a glass on a tray, which she bore with considerable pride.

"Hebe personified," said Lance. "Beatie, you'll make a useful wife for someone."

The little girl laughed and ran out again, while Sara proceeded to help herself generously to the spirit. She raised her glass half way to her lips when she replaced it on the tray. "'Ow rude I am," she said, beaming upon Lance. "Won't you 'ave a wet, Captain?"

"No, thank you," said Lance. "Thanks all the same."

"And you, Major?"

"No, thank you. I'd rather wait for tea. I expect it is now coming."

He had not heard the tinkle of the front door bell which had been drowned by Sara's potent voice. And he thought that Glady's, whose approach along the passage outside the door, was audible, was bringing in the tea equipment. Instead she entered to announce another visitor.

"Mrs. Black," she said.

Sara gulped down the rest of her drink hurriedly, for she had a vague notion that while the men might regard her indulgence in spirits that hot afternoon with toleration, it would hardly be the case with "a lidy."

With hands which were deft from experience she swiftly shifted the tray, decanter, carafe and glass towards Roger, and then prepared, with beaming countenance, to meet the newcomer.

Cora Black had kohled her eyes with a little extra black, and had used both powder puff and carmine generously. She prided herself on being very select in her circle of friends, and resolutely refused to know Mrs. Constable because the latter was on visiting terms with a wealthy family of hauliers.

"My deeah Miss Lightfoot," drawled Cora, "I'm so sorry to have missed Mrs. Greenfield. Your maid tells me that she has gone to town with the Captain. But the pleasure of making your acquaintance consoles me."

She shook hands languidly, and surveyed the other occupants of the room through a lorgnette. She recognised them both, and her heart rose. For three years she had persistently refused to know Mabel, had cut her dead, after meeting her at tea on one of those occasions, during the early days of Mabel's residence, when she was asked out to be examined and criticised before being discarded. But since Mabel had been seen in close communion with the Horrex set at the tennis club, Cora, and many of her friends, had made up their minds to endeavour to use her as a bridge over the gulf which separated the natives from the Cockleview Côterie.

Lucy made the introductions perfunctorily, and Lance prepared himself for further developments of the situation which was rejoicing his mischievous bent.

"So glad to meet you," said Cora to Lance. "How is dear Lord Scratby? He must have been so anxious about you, when you were at the front! We read here of your gallant deeds, and were so proud when we heard that you were staying at Cockleview."

"Lor!" said Sara. "Was 'is nime in the pipers? I never see it!"

Cora's eyebrows rose, and she looked at Sara. "I don't think I quite caught the name," she said.

"My nime?" asked Sara. "Mrs. Captain Teague, Mrs. Captain Brine Teague. That's me!" She beamed upon Cora. "All captains and majors, aren't we?"

Cora, not unnaturally, assumed that the "Captain" meant Captain either in the senior or the junior service. That certainly gave the woman an established position. But it was clear that there had been a *mésalliance,* unless her husband was one of those gallant fellows who had risen from the ranks of the proletariat to command.

"Ah. Thank you," said Cora. Then, turning to Lucy, she said, "I hoped that Mrs. Greenfield might be able to persuade her friend Mrs. Horrex to take a stall at the sale we are getting up for the hospital. I am one of the organising committee, and we should so like Mrs. Horrex to help us. It is so important to keep the stall holders select. There is that Mrs.

Constable who pushes herself everywhere, and whom one really cannot know because she mixes with trade, and so many of us have been ill with influenza, that it is quite difficult to keep out undesirables. Perhaps you would be kind enough to ask Mrs. Horrex? Or, perhaps, what would be better, you would take me up to Cockleview and make me known to her."

Lance and Roger exchanged a look. "Rather a tall order," whispered Lance. "This woman is not lost for cheek; what?"

Lucy flushed a little. She saw the impertinence which, so strangely were Cora and her class constituted, the latter did not realise.

"Yes, Luce," cried Sara. "That'll be fine, and you can tike me hup at the sime time!"

"I'm sorry," said Lucy. "But as I have already explained to Mrs. Teague, I do not know Mrs. Horrex."

"But your sister is so intimate with her that she would be delighted to see you," suggested Cora.

"I really could not approach her in that way. I am left in charge here, and my time is rather fully occupied. I daresay Captain Perryman would be pleased to help you," said Lucy mischievously.

"I should be delighted," replied Lance, shaking his head at her surreptitiously. "But the King's regulations forbid anything of that kind."

"Good lord, how you can lie," muttered Roger in Lance's ear.

"But you could take a message, could you not? And then, perhaps, Mrs. Horrex would call here at some appointed time, and I could meet her here. You would get to know her like that," she explained to Lucy, with a suggestion of patronage. After all, who was Lucy? She was Mabel's sister it was true. But then Mabel was of no consequence except as the friend of the Horrex set, and the wife of a man who seemed to be on intimate terms with men like Major Upton and Lance Perryman.

Lance thought that it was time to do something. He would try what shocking the lady would effect. "I'm sure, Adoline wouldn't take it on," he said. "She doesn't go in for bun fights. She loathes 'em, don't you know."

It took a good deal more than that to shock Cora Black. She smiled upon Lance. "But this is not a bun fight," she explained. "It is a sale of things given by people here, most of them friends of mine—and the proceeds are for the hospital. There are jewels and pictures and some very valuable articles. And there is to be a variety entertainment. The Pierrots from Lyemouth are coming, and the children of some of quite the best people are going to give a living picture scene. Tea will be provided at a shilling a head. The entrance fee in the afternoon will be a shilling to keep it select. In the evening when the tradespeople will come it will only be sixpence. Of course, I should not ask Mrs. Horrex or any of the best people to stay for the evening."

"When is it ?" asked Lance, with a happy thought.

"On Tuesday week."

"Oh ! Then I know they can't manage it. General Lampeter is coming down to stay about then, and we shall all be busy blacking the old boy's boots, don't you know. Sorry."

"Is there a General Lampeter, old son ?" he asked Roger, under his breath.

"Oh, I *must* meet a general," cried Sara.

"It's all kid." Lance muttered to her, unheard by Cora.

"Oh ! You *are* a naughty man !" wheezed Sara, delighted at being addressed so familiarly by the noble youth.

"What a pity !" cried Cora.

At this point Gladys brought in tea, and the conversation halted for a few minutes. Then Sara opened the ball again. "I will tike a stall if you like," she said. "I'm a good sileswoman. I'll lay I'll get the boodle out of their pockets and all too!"

"Most kind of you," said Cora. "But I am afraid the stall holders are confined to residents of the town."

"Lor! That's a pity! Well I dessay my 'usband will send for me before, so it don't matter a deal."

Cora was beginning to feel that her condescension was wasted. Sara was too much for her. And Lucy did not display the humility and appreciation of her patronage that were due from her.

Still she would stay till tea was over.

"Where might your 'ouse be?" asked Sara. "I'll give ye a call some arternoon when I've nothin' better to do, if ye like."

"I'm afraid I am engaged," said Cora.

"What allus?" cried Sara.

"Yes, always." Cora raised her lorgnette, and surveyed the gross woman through it in a manner that even she saw was impertinent.

She began to flush. Her temper was getting the better of her. The whiskey she had taken fasting, had affected even her seasoned head. "And you won't tike me up to Cockleview neether?" she said to Lucy.

"You know I can't," replied poor Lucy testily.

"I s'pose I'm not good enough for the likes of you," said Sara, sneering so that her upper lip rolled back and showed her false teeth. "I'm sure I ought to be griteful as I'm allowed to breathe the sime hair. No thank you, Captain and Major. I dessay you're hall right. But I 'ave my own feelin's and I ain't a goin' to stye 'ere no longer to be snuffed, so put that in yer pipe and smoke it. And a nice lot all of you hare 'ere, if the tiles I 'ear from my landlidy is true. A very nice lot hindeed. Not one of you got a 'alfpenny to rub ageinst another, and 'alf of you man mad. Oh, I'm a goink, Lucy, and many thanks to you for yer tea. And neether you nor Mibel need sweat yerselves as I shall trouble ye more. I ha' done. My Brine was right. You're a party o' bloomin' snobs, you are, and if it weren't for the gentlemen I'd sye a bit more."

No doubt the stimulant with which she had preceded the tea, taken before she had eaten anything, was partly responsible for Sara's outburst. But she had been storing up explosives. That morning she had forced herself on Cutwater till he had been compelled to extricate himself from her in a way which penetrated her hide. And now she began to see that Lance had been laughing at her. That even Roger had used words in order to "flummox" her—as she put it to herself. She found that she stood no chance of forcing her way into the circle she longed to penetrate, and the grapes at once became very sour. Brian was right. She would content herself for the future with the seafaring men she met, and with her old cronies at the East End.

In a different way she had reached the same conclusion as Mabel. To struggle to associate with those who considered themselves to be above her ("not as they hare reelly," she consoled herself by saying) was a game not worth the candle.

Without condescending any further farewell, she flounced out of the house, down to her rooms, whence presently she emerged, and getting herself and her luggage into a cab, for which her landlady had sent, she drove to the station and caught the next train for Port Talbot.

"What a curious person," said Cora, when she had gone. "Have you known her long?"

And Lucy was strictly truthful in saying that she had never seen her till she came to Cocklemouth.

Cora had decided that she would make no headway by persisting in her endeavours to get to know the Horrex set through the Greenfields or any of their friends. And as soon as the last cake was eaten she took her leave.

"Tell your sister not to trouble to return my call," she said insolently, as she gave a flabby handshake to the girl. "I daresay I shall meet her in the town." She snapped at Roger, and even showed her teeth at the earl's son, so disappointed she was to find that neither her social elevation nor her personal charms had been sufficient to induce the young men to assist her to enter their own sphere. She took her departure full of bitterness, and at once began to weave stories to tell her friends to the discredit of the Greenfields and all that appertained to them.

"'Pon my word," said Lance, at length giving vent to his laughter, "I think the Teague woman is the better of the two."

CHAPTER XXIV

LANCE TRIES HIS LUCK

MABEL and Jack were away in town a fortnight. And by the end of that time Jack had been appointed to a certain mysterious department which concerned itself with chemical experiments in explosives and poison gas. For once the War Office had shown the sense to perceive that a highly skilled and talented analytical chemist might be of more use in research than in the fighting ranks, and the result was that he obtained an appointment which necessitated his living again on the East Coast, and provided him with an income far in excess of anything he had previously earned.

On the day before the return to Cocklemouth, a day's outing had been arranged for Lucy and Beatie by the two officers, who had sedulously done their best to prevent Lucy from suffering from loneliness during the absence of her sister and brother-in-law. Lance had borrowed the Rolls Royce from Adoline Horrex, and had managed to get together a hamper of good things to eat and drink. The day was exquisite, a light rain having laid the dust, and the excursion was to take the party to one of the wildest and loveliest spots on Dartmoor.

During the fortnight both Lance and Roger had wooed Lucy strenuously, each in his particular manner. And while Lucy had from the first known very well which of the two stood the higher in her favour, Roger was tormented with doubt whether she loved him, and Lance was by no means hopeless that his suit would prove unsuccessful.

The two men were open rivals, and chaffed each other about it.

Nor did Adoline Horrex spare Lance as much banter as he was ready to receive without protest. She had by this time met Lucy once, and while she appreciated her beauty was unable to see the value of the girl's modesty, straightforwardness, truthfulness and purity. It was not that Adoline disliked these qualities. Only at the time Lucy did not appeal to her. She said of her, a little contemptuously, "a pretty thing enough, but there's nothing in her!"

It may be that she was a little jealous, for both Roger and Lance were so devoted. But jealousy entered very little into her feelings. She always had enough admirers at hand to satisfy her, and it was rather because Roger had never seemed duly subjugated by her charms, while Lance had never taken her seriously, that she slightly resented their complete prostration at Lucy's feet.

"I hope you'll settle it one way or the other to-day," she said to Lance, as he drove away from Cockleview with the Rolls Royce which Adoline readily lent him. "It is really too absurd to see the way you and Roger hang on to that girl's skirts. Try to fix it up definitely somehow, I don't care how. There, go along! And if you like, I'll wish you luck, though in my opinion Roger is the man!"

And as Lance drove down to Lambyre Road he had an uneasy feeling that Adoline was right, and that though Lucy had been charming to him, had laughed at his jokes, and entered into his fooleries, there was a quiet warmth in her eyes when she looked at Roger, which betrayed her partiality for the elder man. "Perhaps," thought poor Lance, "it is just as well. For I suppose the governor would have kicked up the devil of a shine if I married her!"

"But she's worth it. I'm damned if she is not. And I mean to have a shot."

He and Roger had tossed up on the previous evening for the driver's seat, for they thought that Lucy would be sure to wish to sit in front. Lance had won and deliberated whether he should propose during the drive, while she was beside him, or whether he should wait till lunch time, and then persuade her to walk with him up some lonely tor where, unseen by aught but the granite rocks and the sky, he could plead his cause.

Possibly Lucy guessed that she was expected to take the seat beside the driver, and suspected that some such thought had entered Lance's mind as was indeed occupying it. At any rate, when the time came to start she insisted on Beatie's taking the front seat, while she entered the rear part of the car.

Lance protested in vain. "I'm going to drive you know, Miss Lightfoot," he said, "and Roger will tell you it is always interesting to sit in the front seat when I drive. You never know what's going to happen."

"For the Lord's sake be careful to-day, Lamprey," said Roger. "Other people have bones to break if you have none. I've been over the moor in a car several times and the roads are very tricky."

"Listen at him," cried Lance. "Does the old gaffer think that he is the only one who had motored over Dartmoor! Pooh! I'll bet you I've had more smashes up on the moor than you have. And with any luck we may add to the number to-day."

"Please don't," laughed Lucy. "It would be rather awkward to be smashed up miles away from any help."

"Yes," said Roger. "Don't play the goat to-day, old chap."

"Would *you* like to drive?" asked Lance, mischievously, knowing well enough that now that Lucy had made up her mind to sit behind, Roger was chuckling to himself because he lost the toss.

"No, thank you. I think not."

Beatie snuggled into the car close beside Lance, who had got into her especially good graces. He always treated her "like a grown up," she said. Whereas, like Roger, he really adapted himself in a way which he knew to be agreeable to children of her age by experience of a sister of his own.

In the splendid rush of air over the windscreen, which "whooshed" astern as the great car ate up the miles, Lucy felt a tenseness in the atmosphere. For a long time no word was spoken between her and Roger, though Beatie was chattering away all the time to the man at the wheel. To do Lance justice, he made no attempt to listen to anything which was being said behind him. He played the game like the gentleman he was, and was just as fair as he would have been in a game of rackets or single-handed tennis, or even in an aerial duel with a Hun.

At last the silence grew on Lucy's nerves. She believed that Roger loved her, and she had a shrewd suspicion that Lance was his rival. It would be untrue to say that she was not flattered by the rivalry. But while she had little doubt as to the state of the affections of the two men, she was not certain that either of them was "in earnest." They were both so much above her. It was difficult for her to realise that she, who little more than a fortnight since, had lived in the sphere of "old Sam Lightfoot," at Herringhaven, was now the beloved of a man like Roger Upton, and possibly of an earl's son. While she had always been fond of Jack Greenfield, she had never grudged Mabel her rise in the social scale. In the old days she had, perhaps, envied her sister for her husband. But it was for the man's sake and not for the sake of his position. She had sometimes thought that she would not have been so sullen and cold a wife to him, as Mabel had been in those early days at Herringhaven. But she had never guessed how near she had come to loving Jack with a love beyond that of a sister. And this somewhat puzzled her, for she told herself that the feelings she had towards Roger were not greatly different from those she had at one time entertained for Jack. There were, perhaps, more uncertainty, and more hope about her thoughts of Roger. But, as yet, her blood had not been keenly stirred. She was so pure and innocent, that it needed some physical experience to rouse the passion which was slumbering within her.

So it was that she awaited the fate destined for her with patience. There was no feverish eagerness to hear either Roger or Lance declare his love.

And Roger guessed something of this, and feared lest the first man to speak might win her; feared lest Lance, by telling his love and taking her in his arms, might deceive her into believing that she loved him. Would it be deception though? It is likely that there was some reason in Roger's fears. Lucy liked Lance well enough to be able to hear him speak of love without feeling repugnance. Possibly a kiss from Lance might have awakened her to the fact that it was Roger whom she really loved. Possibly the feel of Lance's arms about her would have revolted her. But only possibly. Roger felt that a great deal depended in the chances of the day. By speaking in the car, when he would be unable to stir her blood by kisses, he might lose her. On the other hand, he could not be certain that when she was out of the car he would be able to get her to himself before Lance did so. And he knew that the matter would be settled before they returned to Cocklemouth.

"Your responsibility is nearly over, Major Upton," said Lucy at last, with an uneasy laugh. "You will be pleased when they come home to-morrow, won't you?"

"You know I shall not," said Roger, in low but vibrant tones. "Don't you?"

His eyes yearned as he looked the girl full in the face, and she flushed a little.

"You have been very kind," she said. "I suppose we shall be busy packing up to move as soon as they are back. Jack is lucky to have got a position which will take him back to Daneshire."

By this time the car was well out on the moor. Chagford had been passed and left behind. On all sides was the moor, rising and falling in mighty sweeps of furze and heather. Ahead loomed Hamildon Down, and a sharp turn to the left brought the Haytor rocks cutting the sky clear ahead.

Lance slowed down. "Good place to lunch, what?" he asked. "Plenty of water for the whiskey in this little brook."

He stopped the car, running it just off the roadway onto a piece of short springy turf, firm to wheels and foot with its base of the omnipresent granite.

"I've been doing the work all the morning," said Lance. "Miss Lightfoot and I are going up those rocks, while you and Beatie unpack the hamper, aren't we?" he asked Lucy. His irrepressible spirits inclined him to turn two or three somersaults on the turf, but he felt that it would hardly be a proper introduction to the serious question which he meant to put to Lucy if his ruse for getting her alone succeeded.

For an instant, Roger hesitated. Then he thought, "He may as well have his chance and get it over. If she accepts him, well she would probably refuse me."

He did not fully appreciate the danger he ran. But he believed that it was just within the bounds of possibility that Lucy would take the first man who asked her, for she was still asleep to the real passion of her heart.

"I like your cheek," said Roger. "Do you really wish to toil up that hill, Miss Lightfoot ?"

And Lucy, who had also come to the conclusion that it would be well to "get it over," replied that she thought she would like to see the view from the top of the tor.

"Don't be long, Aunt Lucy," said Beatie. "I'm hungry."

"And I've got a thirst on me," said Lance. "You'll find a jug for the water, old son, and there is a corkscrew in the hamper. So please see that everything is ready for us when we return."

"Oh, you be hanged," said Roger. He bent to his task a little sullenly. He had hoped the girl would have refused to accompany Lance.

Lance was singularly quiet for him as he and Lucy mounted the rise. "I wish I had not played the fool so much before her," he thought. "And what an ass she must have thought me the first time she saw me. Still, hang it all, she knows me as I am now, so if she takes me she won't be disappointed."

Here and there blocks of granite cropped out from the turf, and as the hill rose towards the cluster of rocks at the top, these made the going difficult. Lance took Lucy's hand to help her up. He thrilled to the touch of her, and began to feel uneasy. He had rollicked and laughed, flirted in his buoyant way with dozens of girls, but he had never before felt so dissatisfied with himself.

Both were averse from talking, and the silence was so noticeable that Lance thought a word of explanation necessary.

"Just as well to save one's breath for climbing, isn't it ?" he asked, and immediately afterwards told himself he was an ass for making so obvious a remark.

The rocks loomed immensely larger than they looked from the roadway as the two drew near them. There was a majesty of solitude about them which daunted the spirits even on that bright sunny day. A suggestion of innumerable past ages hung about those granite emblems of antiquity. The wind blew colder, and the outspread moor assumed an aspect of eerie menace as a cloud swept across the sun. Lucy shivered slightly. They were on the shady side of the rocks.

"Ugh," said Lance. "Shivery, isn't it? Let's get on the sunny side."

He knew, and she knew, that on the sunny side they would be out of sight of the others, and when they passed round the grey masses not a living thing was in sight but a few moorland ponies, which were cropping the sweet grass in the hollow between two swelling humps of common.

"I expect you are a little tired," said Lance. "Won't you sit down here for a bit."

Two flat-topped rocks jutted from the main mass, and afforded seats roomy enough for half a dozen people. On these Lucy seated herself, with Lance beside her.

"Now for it," thought Lance. He was not in uniform, and he took his tweed cap from his head and began to play with it, picking out pieces of wool. Lucy's heart beat frantically. "Oh!" she thought, "I wish he would speak and get it over! What a boy he is!"

At last Lance plucked up courage to lift his eyes from his cap and turn them on Lucy.

"I believe you know why I wanted you to come up here with me," he said.

Lucy did not speak.

"You must know I love you, dear. Oh, tell me you care for me too. Tell me you love me."

"I—I——"

Lucy could not bring the words to her lips which she wanted. Now that the moment had come which she had been anticipating, she felt curiously at a loss.

Lance took her hesitation as a favourable sign. He bent to her, and flinging his arm round her waist he tried to draw her to him. His touch told her everything. She shrank from him. "No, no," she cried. "I don't love you! I'm sorry; oh, so sorry, Captain Perryman. But I don't."

For a moment he held her, struggling. "Sure?" he asked. "Sure?"

"Yes; oh, yes! I know now! I knew as soon as you touched me!" she said. "Please forgive me, and do not mind much. I could not! I did not know before. It was your touch told me! Forgive me."

Lance released her at once.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I hoped you would be my wife."

"You don't think I've been unfair to you? I—I was not sure you really—really cared," stammered Lucy. "Oh, I put it so badly. I want to say that I never meant to let you think I cared."

"You did not. It is only my own infernal impudence," said Lance, thinking at the same time how few girls would have been so scrupulous to tell the truth in the circumstances. For though he was boyish and irresponsible in his gaiety, he was no fool, and was quite aware that he was a matrimonial prize in the eyes of the world. Lucy's honesty caused him to regret the loss of her still more keenly. He knew how rare was such honesty, how true hearted a girl she must be to refuse all that he offered merely because she did not—love him. Amongst the girls of his set, he told himself that he might have picked and chosen. And here was a girl so far beneath him in birth and wealth that he was almost a King Cophetua to her. Yet she would not take him and all that he had to offer, because she did not love him.

"I wish you'd change your mind," he said, with a smile that was rather wry. "You know, I believe I could make you happy."

"I believe you would try your hardest," she said. "But, oh! Captain Perryman, think of the difference between us! Think of the difference between my people and your people!"

"Ah! And you cannot say, 'Thy people shall be my people,' eh, Luce? You don't mind me calling you Luce?"

"Oh, not a bit. You know I like you awfully. I really do. And you have been as kind as kind to me. But I don't love you in that way."

"Oh for the love of love and his soft hours, don't say you'll be a sister."

"I won't. It would be impertinent in a girl like me. But I will be a friend if you will let me."

"Well, I suppose, I shall get over it. But you know it is a bit of a facer. You've cut my comb! And the worst of it is that I'm all the fonder of you for giving me the push! It shows how straight you are. Well, well, he's a lucky devil, but I *will* say he is a good sort and deserves his luck."

He smiled at her as she flushed. "I don't know whom you mean," she said.

He shook his head at her, grinning. "That is the first disingenuous thing I ever heard you say. But, I suppose, even you could hardly be expected to rise above it. You know whom I mean as well as I do, and we won't keep him waiting any longer. Let me have just one kiss for luck, just a friendly kiss on your cheek as a consolation prize, and then—well, I'll give way to my betters."

Now that there was no question of lovemaking, Lucy felt no reluctance to letting him kiss her cheek. She knew that she could trust him not to abuse her permission, and she did like him very much. She held her cheek out to him without mock modesty, and he touched it lightly with his lips, holding down the longing to take her in his arms and smother her mouth with kisses of a very different kind.

"Thanks," he said. "Rather mawkish, what? Still, it's something to remember. Now come along to the happy man."

"You must not say that," protested the girl. "I do not know that he——" She stopped the words upon her lips, for fear of being again accused of being disingenuous.

"If you don't, I do," said Lance. "So come along, and put him out of suspense. He must have felt pretty confident or he would not have let us go off as he did. No. I ought not to say that. It is not fair. He is a sportsman, and gave me my chance. Well, I had it."

"Thank you for being so kind," said Lucy, now feeling rather humble. Certainly Lance had behaved very well. She had seen the passion in his eyes when first he had embraced her, and that was what had set up the feeling of repugnance, and awoke her to her own passion for another man. But he had controlled himself admirably, and she felt a sort of regret that she had been unable to give him the love for which he asked.

CHAPTER XXV AND LAST.

NATURAL PLUMAGE

"WELL, I'm not going to wear my heart upon my sleeve for Roger to peck at," said Lance. "Come on. I'll race you down the hill to show there is no ill-feeling."

Lance was too elastic of temperament to remain doleful long. And so cheerful did both he and Lucy appear when they rejoined the other that Roger drew the wrong conclusion. It was only when Lance got him aside for a moment and told him to go in and win, that he believed that his chance was still to be put to the test. During lunch Lance kept the party merry enough with his quips, and so delighted Beatie that she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. "I do love you!" she cried.

"Thank the lord, someone has sense," cried Lance, with a humorous glance at Lucy. "Well, little lady, you must make haste and grow up. But, bless your heart, you'll be fickle like all your sex. You won't do that in six or seven years' time, see if you will!"

"You'll be awful old then, won't you?" asked Beatie, with the usual childish inability to appreciate age. "But I fink you're awful nice," declared Beatie.

"Why don't you two leave a pair of lovers together?" asked Lance. "Can't you see you're in the way. I want to be alone with my gal. Clear out, both of you, and go and inspect that hut circle. It's only just over the rise."

"I should like to examine a hut circle," said Roger. "But, perhaps, you're too tired, Miss Lightfoot."

"Oh, Lucy isn't tired, are you, Luce?" asked Lance, using the girl's Christian name maliciously, and enjoying the look of indignation which momentarily passed across Roger's face.

"No. I'm not tired," replied the girl, shaking her head in remonstrance at him. For she understood why he had called her Lucy twice, very well. Roger was vexed. She looked at him, and her heart throbbed at the thought that she had the power to console him for that and for more than that. Lance had said that Roger loved her, and she did not believe that he would have made the statement unless he had been sure.

Still, she was not quite certain whether she loved him enough. The passion of repugnance which Lance's embrace had caused had only partially aroused the passion of love. It needed the touch of the beloved to do that.

She and Roger spoke but little on their way over the crest of a rise towards one of the remains of prehistoric Dartmoor. The stones of the circle were almost white in the sun, and caught their eyes as soon as they topped the hill. When on the descent they were invisible from the car, and Roger felt that he could wait no longer.

He turned and took both Lucy's hands. "My dear," he said, "I love you with all my heart and soul. Will you be my wife? Oh, Lucy! I love you so."

Her eyes met his shyly. She did not speak, but she did not shrink from him when she saw his arms steal out towards her. He flung them round her, and drew her to him. And, as she felt his embrace, all her dormant passion awoke, and leapt to generous life. With perfect trust and innocence she raised her mouth to meet his, and as he pressed his lips to hers she closed her eyes in ecstasy, and flinging her own arms round his neck she clasped him tightly, giving him kiss for kiss, her bosom panting against his chest.

Ah! Now she knew! Now she knew that she loved, and whom she loved, and that he was hers and she was his. He was her man, and she was his woman.

So long did they sit amidst the stones of the circle when they reached them that Lance and Beatie grew impatient.

"Come on, Beatie," said Lance. "It is time to stir up those two, or we shan't get home to-night. I'll give you half way up the hill and race you."

Off went Beatie, looking back every now and then as girls will when they are given a start in a footrace.

When they reached the top together, they saw Roger and Lucy sitting amongst the stones, and Roger's arm was round his beloved.

"Hi!" shouted Lance. "Hi! Aren't you coming home to-night?"

"Don't let us go any further," he said to Beatie. But the child was already racing down the further side of the hill, and Lance saw her caught up in Lucy's arms, saw her look up at the words spoken to her, and saw her kiss Roger.

"I knew it would be all right," he said. "Well, my nose is out of joint. But, perhaps, it is just as well. Damn it, I may as well try to be philosophical. Crying won't win her. As the poet says, 'If of herself she will not love, nothing can make her, the devil take her.' No. I won't say the devil take her because she is really a dear girl, the best I ever struck, and Roger is a good sort. But, damn it! I wish I did not care so much! Care killed a cat. But it won't kill me. I'll make love to Adoline

Horrex to-night to keep up my spirits, and make Bobbie Carstairs mad."

Needless to say, Jack and Mabel were delighted with the news on their return home. Roger had no living parent to consider. His little sister would, he felt sure, be delighted with Lucy. And it was decided that the marriage should take place as soon as possible.

The marriage was solemnised at Cocklemouth, and was made quite a function by the attendance of a large contingent from Cockleview, Mrs. Horrex's friends, both male and female, and including her retiring husband, turning up in great strength. Many of the women who had snubbed Mabel had called and fished for invitations. But now that she was about to leave the town, she had no inclination to take the trouble to make these snobs suffer for their previous insolence to her. She quietly intimated that she had no wish to increase her acquaintance, and that as she was soon to leave Cocklemouth it would be foolish to do so.

Fortunately, Sara Teague did not get to hear of the wedding till it was a *fait accompli*. But she wrote an extraordinary letter to Lucy, on seeing the announcement in the papers. However, as this was left unanswered she resigned herself to remain firm to her determination made on leaving Cocklemouth, to keep to her own sphere for the future.

Mabel, too, has learnt her lesson, and by degrees she is becoming popular with the best people of the town, where her husband's abilities are still utilised. By ceasing to force herself forward and upwards, she has naturally become acclimatised to her position, and has learnt how to entertain her equals, her superiors and her inferiors with equal good taste and grace.

On discarding the feathers of the peacock her own plumage took on its proper lustre, and revealed its really lovely hues. Perhaps, she is a little too severe on those who endeavour to shine on a social plane higher than that to which they belong, and on women who are indiscreet in their flirtations. But my readers who have followed her vicissitudes will understand that this was inevitable.

Roger now resides on his estate not far from the town where Jack is working, and the two families are on the most intimate and affectionate terms.

Lance Perryman is still a bachelor, and has reaped countless honours by such air fighting as only his peculiar anatomy and temperament render possible.

"What was it that upset Mabel Greenfield?" Adoline Horrex asked Percy Burnside the night before he left Cockleview.

"My dear lady, how should I know?" replied the Colonel blandly. "How can one explain the vagaries of your charming sex?"

THE END

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